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Kari Eleana Goin

*Portland State University*

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Radical (Re)Positioning of Students as Cocreators of Curriculum:  
A Participatory Action Research Study of Undergraduate Student–Instructor Partnerships  
in Online Learning Environments

by

Kari Eleana Goin

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education  
in  
Educational Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction

Dissertation Committee:  
Dot McElhone, Chair  
Esperanza De La Vega  
Michael Smith  
Shawn Smallman  
Sonja Taylor

Portland State University  
2022

## Abstract

Undergraduate curriculum is not representative of all students. Course content, language, images, and textbooks often reinforce societal power relations and hierarchies that tend to center white, male, hetero, middle-class, able-bodied identities. When students' varied cultural and linguistic identities are not represented in the curriculum, inadequately represented students are less likely to actively participate, persist, and continue their education. Emerging scholarship indicates that student–instructor cocreation of course syllabi, materials, and/or classroom experiences is a promising practice for increasing representation and responsiveness to student voices, although researchers do not know how the process of cocreation unfolds in asynchronous spaces. Enrollment in undergraduate online courses across the United States steadily increased from 2012–2021, which created a sense of urgency to understand inclusive and equitable pedagogies for teaching online. In this participatory action research study, five female instructors and one educator researcher incorporated qualitative methods to explore cocreated student–instructor partnerships in asynchronous curriculum. Instructors experienced the collaborative group as a support that helped them to navigate the challenges of cocreation and to take varying levels of risk by disrupting traditional instructor–student power dynamics and by offering students choices to self-direct and enhance their learning (which students took up to varying degrees). Synthesis of our findings included presentation of a model for designing cocreated curriculum for students in online courses. Implications for future practice for instructors and educators are included.

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## **Preface**

I purposefully choose not to capitalize the word “white” (in reference to race) and the word “western” (in reference to European and North American perspectives). My intention is to decenter white privilege and western dominance and acknowledge historic and ongoing inequities related to race. Additionally, bell hooks is not capitalized as the author has indicated her preference for her pen name to be referenced using lowercase letters (Lee, 2019). The term Latine is a gender-neutral form of the word Latino, created by LGBTQIA+, gender non-binary, and feminist communities in Spanish speaking countries. I refer to people from Spanish speaking countries by Latine, based on my understanding of how they refer to themselves using a gender neutral term.

## **Chapter 1: The Problem**

As a freshman in college, I took Anthropology 101, which had 200+ students; we attended in-person lectures twice a week, and our final grade consisted of three 100-point multiple choice exams. I earned the lowest grade I have ever received, a D, prompting me to repeat the course later that summer. I felt I had failed anthropology. I believed I did not have what it took; I was not smart enough to succeed in that field. As a result, I chose an educational journey that did not include large lecture courses, but instead led me to small, creative courses where I could work with my hands, practice critical thinking, and build relationships. I took courses like Spanish cooking and photography, and I traveled abroad twice, immersing myself in cultures that were new to me. I signed up for courses that were practicum-based or experiential, such as teaching Spanish in after-school programs for youth in my community.

After college, I again sought to extend my education in experiential courses and entered a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program in digital media. I joined a small cohort of seven highly engaged artists who collaborated in part due to the steep learning curve of the program and in part due to the nature of the learning material, including various software across multiple areas of design including 2D and 3D animation, illustration, photography, and web design and development. In my MFA program, I built wonderful relationships with fellow students, taught multiple classes at the 100-, 200-, and 300-level as instructor of record, learned the strengths of collaboration in various learning environments, and thrived, earning a 4.0 grade point average (GPA). I believe my success in my MFA program was related to the small class sizes, direct experience with teaching a full-time teaching load (i.e., three courses or 12 credits a term), and the learning

community built with fellow students. My success in graduate school led me to accept a job in online education related to digital design and accessibility of digital learning environments.

As I began my career in online education, the experiential and creative spaces I had come to know in graduate school disappeared. Gone were the inventive, colorful, intimate, and personal learning experiences. In their place were words like “rigor,” “academic integrity,” “locking students out of accessing course materials ahead of time,” “deadlines,” and “allow one quiz attempt.” I heard a mantra in my head repeating, “How can I prevent my students from cheating?,” the most common question heard at my job in the Office of Academic Innovation. I am frequently asked to build and advise on creating multiple choice exams, the very experiences I had actively moved away from as an undergraduate student.

After my mom passed away when I was 9 years old, my dad took my sister and me to the ceramics studio every week where we molded, shaped, painted, and fired clay; experiential learning and healing connected with artistic and creative expression. To express myself creatively is part of my identity: it is how I learn, how I teach, how I communicate, how I heal. My identity as an artist and educator felt at odds with being tasked with designing the types of learning environments not supportive of diverse ways of knowing and meaning making—learning environments built with only one pathway to success that offer students no opportunities to connect their home life, communities, family, language, or diverse ways of knowing into the classroom.

Curriculum in higher education has a long history of privilege, exclusion (Cohen & Kisker, 2009), elitism (Rudolph, 1977), and practices based on deficit views of



students (Nieto, 2000; Paraskeva, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2019). In my job designing online courses and programs, I am often transported back to my anthropology class where there was only one path to success, and that path was a 100-point Scantron, despite decades of research on the benefits of experiential and high-impact learning (Baldwin et al., 2017; Fink, 2003; Koris et al., 2021; Kuh, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995). I have found myself struggling with why the field of online education is not more creative, collaborative, or connected to community issues (as is art), and why the field is not focused on relationship building, healing, creativity, or critical thinking. What if my voice as a student had been centered back in that Anthropology 101 course? What if I had been offered choices about how I wanted to showcase my understanding of the material in a way that met course objectives? As an artist, I could have used creative skills to meet course objectives, such as constructing a photographic portfolio with written reflections related to the course goals or a digital archive of historic anthropologists and their research. Kuh (2008) found assigning such projects is an example of a high-impact teaching practice. I could have collaborated with other students in the class or built relationships with working anthropologists in the field. As an undergraduate student taking Anthropology 101, I had ideas about how I wanted to represent my learning process, but I never had an opportunity to contribute those ideas.

I continue to reflect on how and when students have opportunities to see their identities and ways of knowing represented in the curriculum. It is important to note that as universities become more diverse, representation will need to be flexible to many different identities and ways of making meaning. I believe there is no right way to learn something and demonstrate knowledge; yet, often the expectation for learning is limited

to the instructor's needs and expectations for success. When this happens, courses are organized around a single pedagogical approach to represent learning for all students, and inequities inevitably result.

### **Land Acknowledgement**

I came to this research motivated to listen and learn from communities of color with intersectional backgrounds who have long advocated for multiple ways of meaning making to be considered legitimate (Crenshaw, 1988; Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018; Lipka et al., 2005; Paris, 2012; Stapleton, 2016; Taylor et al., 2016; Valenzuela, 2005; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). As I began this research with intention to listen and learn to perspectives outside of my own experiences, I reflected on and offer this land acknowledgement. Although this research happened entirely in online spaces, I have set an intention to reflect and acknowledge the land of spaces I have occupied in my life and throughout this study.

I was born on Wašiw (Washoe) land and currently reside on Cowlitz land. To the Wašiw people, the geographic and spiritual center of the world is Da ow aga (Lake Tahoe) and the Wašiw culture revolves around the connection of land, people, family, and language (The Washoe Cultural Resources Office, 2009). Steven James, a Wašiw tribal Elder, says “the language, culture and the land cannot be separated. The language is the identity of the Washoe People” (The Washoe Cultural Resources Office, 2009, p. 6). For decades, the Wašiw people were forced to assimilate to speak English and endure settler colonialism in Nevada. As a result, the Wašiw language is spoken fluently by fewer than 20 people (Gordon & Gordon, 2019).

The Cowlitz peoples have a history of journeying by canoe on major waterways in the Pacific Northwest, drumming and singing at ceremonies in connection with healing and celebration, and currently dedicate their time to health, education, scientific research, housing, transportation, development, elder care, public safety, conservation, and legal issues (Cowlitz Indian Tribe, 2022). For the Cowlitz peoples, community building is essential to “knowing” (Cowlitz Indian Tribe, 2022). Both the Wašiw and Cowlitz people describe multiple ways of honoring meaning making in specific ways grounded to the land, people, and language.

As educators move away from physical spaces and in-person interactions with people for learning, it is important to set an intention to bring connections to earth, land, family, community, and language into online learning spaces. As it may not be readily apparent how to foster such connection, I call for educators to set an intention to create opportunities for students to connect with their culture(s), home communities, and any languages they speak or learn to speak. Educators should center community building as an important practice in online learning environments to counter existing educational inequities that may hinder a student’s educational progress and ways of knowing.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Undergraduate curriculum is not representative of all students (Arday et al., 2021; Bastedo, 2012; Hogben & Waterman, 1997; hooks, 1994; McConachy, 2018; Tuitt et al., 2018; Wymer & Fulford, 2019). Course content such as language, images, and textbooks often reinforce societal power relations and hierarchies that tend to center white, male, hetero, middle-class, able-bodied identities (Bernal, 2002; McLaren, 2002; Paraskeva, 2016; Patrón et al., 2020; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Warren et al., 2019).

When students' varied cultural and linguistic identities are not represented in the curriculum, those students are less likely to actively participate, persist, and continue their education (Kaupp, 2012; Patrón et al., 2020; Rovai et al., 2005; Sólorzano et al., 2005).

Emerging scholarship indicates student–instructor cocreation of course syllabi, materials, and/or classroom experiences is a promising practice for increasing representation and responsiveness (Cook-Sather, 2020; Cook-Sather et al., 2018; Flynn & Hayes, 2021; Matthews et al., 2019; Peseta et al., 2021). Positive outcomes of cocreation include increased student engagement (including among students who have been historically excluded), motivation, ownership for learning, more equitable power distribution between instructors and students, and increased student confidence and sense of self-determination (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2019; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). For example, a meta-analysis included 63 articles related to cocreation and 97% of the articles reported such positive outcomes for students, staff, and faculty (Matthews et al., 2019).

Given the rapid transition to remote and online learning formats during Spring 2020 and the steady increase of student enrollment in online courses from 2012–2021 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), representation and responsiveness to student perspectives in online courses are increasingly urgent issues. Although evidence indicates cocreation may effectively address representation and responsiveness in physical classroom settings (Curran, 2017; Hanna-Benson, 2020; Matthews et al., 2017), educators do not know how the process of cocreation unfolds in an asynchronous online space (de Bie et al., 2021).

## **Background of the Problem**

In the United States, the original college curricula were established in the early 1600s, modeled on educational practices used in Europe from the previous 500 years (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). One of the first university structures inherited from 12th century Italy, Spain, Portugal, and central Europe was organized by groups of students who established their own organizations, assemblies, employed faculty, and made decisions about funding, rules around courses of study, assessment, and how degrees were allocated. Curriculum was dedicated to classical writers, the liberal arts, and natural sciences (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). Student-led institutions from this era established ceremonial aspects of graduation and commencement that colleges and universities still celebrate in 2022. Another educational structure inherited from Europe focused largely on religious training for clergy and centered on classical texts and the foundations of Christian religious doctrine (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). In the educational structure based on religious doctrine, authority was derived from the board of governors or the college president, and curriculum was generated from the church (Cohen & Kisker, 2009).

Colleges in the U.S. colonies began by emulating European approaches to higher education, specifically emulating Cambridge University in Scotland, but quickly had to adapt to new forms of government, emerging as they went. As colleges in the U.S. colonies quickly adapted, they dropped student-led approaches and strict church-controlled doctrine, instead opting for passing on wisdom of the classics to young, able men—preparing them not only for service in the clergy, but in public service as well (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). One reason for the mirroring and establishment of European

approaches to higher education in the colonies is many of the colonizing men were graduates of European universities (Cohen & Kisker, 2009).

One aspect that is important to mention is how universities of this time (e.g., Harvard University, Dartmouth College, The College of William & Mary) included efforts at “civilizing” and “Christianizing” indigenous populations, efforts now named as “forced assimilation” (Cohen & Kisker, 2009, p. 21). This effort largely failed with fewer than 50 Indigenous people enrolled, purposefully leaving college teachings at the time exclusively reserved for wealthy, white, Christian men (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Katz, 1983).

### ***Curriculum***

The curriculum has a purpose. Dominated by religious doctrine in the colonial era, curriculum and study were historically about preserving what was already known, not for the advancement of knowledge (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Rudolph, 1977). Varying attempts to redefine curriculum purposes throughout the 20th century indicated a fight for “control of curriculum knowledge and its social function in U.S. society” (Paraskeva, 2016, p. 5). Bobbitt (1918) wrote about the need for a scientific process in curriculum development and called for objectives based on an individual student’s deficiencies within a predefined set of skills. According to Bobbitt, scientific curriculum writers must discover each student’s “social deficiencies that result from a lack of historical, literary, and geographical experiences” (p. 17). Social deficiencies are reflected in learning objectives that must be accomplished by a student to progress through the curriculum. Despite their deficit framing, objectives remain a foundational element in curriculum

design and a requirement for university program accreditation (Office of Postsecondary Education Accreditation Group, 2020).

Popham (1972) also framed education in terms of measurable objectives, which demonstrated a student's accomplishment and proficiency of a subject and reflected a deficit outlook of a student's capability. To Popham, teachers should hold the role of evaluator and decide the worth and value of knowledge, and it is a teacher's job to view students without a certain skillset as starting at a deficit. Eisner (1967) debated the value of educational objectives in that they assume a person of power predicts the outcomes of the instructional process. Eisner (1967) argued "curriculum theory which views educational objectives as standards by which to measure educational achievement overlooks those modes of achievement incapable of measurement" (p. 133). Instead, Eisner called for objectives that are open-ended with multiple ways for an individual to construct curriculum.

Alternatively, Dewey (1929) described the purpose of education as a continual process of community life, concentrating on a student's lived experiences. According to Dewey, schooling should prepare a student for a world that may look very different from the contemporary world of the child's youth and should consider an individual's capabilities, interests, and habits, which are connected with one's home life and community. School then is a "form of community life" (Dewey, 1929, p. 35) intended to deepen and extend one's connection within their community and values from home life. As of 2022, students are rarely centered in curricula in higher education, although Dewey and other scholars (Freire, 1970; Gay, 2002; Giroux, 1979; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995) have long called for student-centered learning.

More recently, the field of curriculum studies has been at odds over whose knowledge holds the most worth (Bastedo, 2012; Paraskeva, 2016). This debate has manifested into fights over what gets taught in schools, such as the challenge to ban Nikole Hannah-Jones's Pulitzer Prize-winning work, *The 1619 Project*, about the history of racial inequity and the Black experience in the United States; or a Tennessee school board ban of *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, the Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel about the Holocaust (Gross, 2022; The New York Times Magazine, 2021). In 2022, there are still contrasting views of the purpose of schooling. There are people who support the promotion of capitalism and for-profit companies, such as McGraw Hill and Pearson learning software, to build curriculum; there are people who support a western, Christian-dominated belief system as the purpose of schooling, consequentially reflected in school bans of works associated with racial equity; and there are people who support the idea of schooling as the encouragement of social justice and a just society (Paraskeva, 2016).

In contemporary higher education, instructors are the decision makers: they decide what is in the curriculum, and they make curricular decisions regarding what and how students participate in class. Instructors who teach full time in degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States are mostly male and white (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a), which often results in a college curriculum centered and focused on a dominant white male perspective. The approach to curriculum where mostly white and male instructors have the sole authority to decide what is in the curriculum and how students learn is a holdover from the European influence on curriculum in the colonial era in the United States. The European influential holdover continues to fail students because it does not align with increasingly diverse and



intersectional higher education classrooms. Despite decades of scholarship voicing the need for multicultural education to support the changing demographics of the enrolled student population (Portland State University [PSU], 2021b; U.S. Department of Education, 2022), strategies to counter dominant white influences in curricula—such as culturally responsive pedagogies and culturally relevant teaching—have not been centered (McLaren, 2002; Solorzano et al., 2005; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Warren et al., 2019).

Several factors may contribute to a white, male elite professoriate and lower representation of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and nonmale scholars in higher education. Literature on the nonwhite, nonmale faculty experience in higher education reveals several challenges BIPOC/nonmale scholars consistently navigate in academia: (a) lack of mentorship, (b) institutional climate that favors specific kinds of research over others, (c) erasure of BIPOCs' and women's experiences within the curriculum, (d) lack of attention to a family–work life balance, (e) microaggressions and discrimination, (f) few opportunities to participate in departmental decision making, and (g) infrequent opportunities to assume leadership positions (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2020; Johnson & Bryan, 2017; Rich, 1977). When university culture upholds structures of racism such as some of the challenges previously listed, and when neoliberal values place priority on profit over student engagement and learning, instructors who put efforts to addressing representation and responsiveness in curriculum may be at odds with institutional standards (Matthews et al., 2018; Museus & LePeau, 2020; Pryor, 2021).

It is important for students to feel seen and represented in course content and in the identities of the instructors teaching the courses. When undergraduate students find

themselves reflected in the curriculum, students learn and grow; however, when students are positioned by an instructor in terms of a deficit, it can decrease student motivation, engagement, effort, growth, and cognitive development (American Association of University Women, 1992). Many students of color (Allen et al., 2002; Jackson and Labissiere, 2017), students with varying abilities (Abram, 2003; Smith & Andrews, 2015), and sexually and gender diverse students (Pryor, 2021) rarely have college instructors who reflect their identities. The lack of nonwhite, nonmale cultural perspectives in college curricula can be explained in part by the colonial era hold over curricula and disproportionately low representation of BIPOC and nonmale scholars in academia. Additionally, when surveyed, instructors indicated although inclusive teaching practices (e.g., culturally responsive pedagogy) were important, instructors lack the knowledge, time, and support to integrate strategies that embrace multiculturalism and cultural-linguistic knowledge into their teaching (Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Prater & Devereaux, 2009).

### ***Access to Higher Education***

Another important contributor to a lack in curricular representation and responsiveness is access to higher education. Access to higher education is not the same for all, with economic and social factors such as the rising cost of college, achievement gaps, retention, suspension, and expulsion rates in K–12 greatly diverging along racial lines. White students on average earn higher grades, have higher test scores, and have a higher likelihood of acceptance in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic and Pacific

Islander students are suspended and face expulsion from school at higher rates than white students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Economic factors, such as the rising cost of tuition and access to financial aid, also play a part in access to higher education for students of different races. Average tuition at public 4-year institutions in the 2018–2019 academic year was \$9,200, or 12% higher than \$8,200 in 2010–2011 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). For private universities, average tuition in 2018–2019 was \$35,800, or 17% higher than in 2010–2011 when tuition was \$30,500 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The significant increase in tuition in 2018 resulted in 85% of students accessing financial aid compared with 75% in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The high cost of attendance to college can be a factor that affects access to higher education especially when considering students who attend historically Black institutions use federal loans to finance college at higher rates and in larger amounts than their peers at nonhistorically Black universities (United Negro College Fund, 2016). Additionally, several private colleges have been sued for racially targeting students of color with false images of success (only 1 in 5 students from these private college graduate), as their programs lead to low levels of gainful employment after graduation, and students end up saddled with astronomically high debt compared to the debt carried by graduates of public institutions (Project on Predatory Student Lending, 2021). The Project on Predatory Student Lending led by legal services at Harvard Law School has indicated predatory for-profit colleges who target students of color have expanded and deepened rather than erasing patterns of inequality and access to higher education for students of color (Project on Predatory Student Lending, 2021).

As a result of the economic and social barriers to higher education BIPOC students face, fewer BIPOC students go on to pursue masters and doctoral studies and eventually become faculty. More faculty of color are employed in higher education than ever before; yet, the demographics of faculty on college campuses remain largely white (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2020). Barriers to access higher education contribute to a lack of representation of racially diverse and intersectional identities of instructors in higher education.

### ***Distance Learning***

Distance education has existed since the 1920s in some form or another, including correspondence courses where students would receive coursework by mail, radio, television, and starting in the 1990s, computers (Russell, 1999). As technology evolved, the idea that technology might improve or hinder learning began to circulate. Thomas Russell at North Carolina State University set out to compile an annotated bibliography of scholarly articles looking for patterns that technology either helped or hindered learning (Russell, 1999). Russell's (1999) takeaway from the bibliography that compared distance education to traditional classrooms was there was "no significant difference" to show that various technologies improved learning:

There is nothing inherent in the technologies that elicits improvements in learning. . . . That is, in going through the process of redesigning a course to adapt the content to the technology, it can be improved. The mere process is where the difference lies. (p. xiii)

One way to interpret Russell's (1999) claim of no significant difference is that technology itself does not improve learning; instead, what requires further study are the ways faculty and students use technology to facilitate learning. Specifically worth

exploring are how faculty use technology to teach, how students use technology as a resource to help them learn, how instructors interact with students online, and how leveraging technology can hinder or aid in learning and teaching.

Recent studies of online learning environments support the need to better understand interactions between instructors and students (Bangert, 2004; Garrison et al., 2000; Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Wang & Stein, 2021; Yang et al., 2011; Yeboah & Smith, 2016). For example, Wang and Stein (2021) wanted to know if teaching presence influenced student learning in online environments and found how an instructor engages with students online does affect students' cognitive development and engagement. A study by Yeboah and Smith (2016) included 149 students who self-identified as students of color (including international students) and who noted challenges with online learning. Students described (a) challenges associated with the relationship with their instructor; (b) the need to have support from the instructor on where to find information and due dates; (c) the need for additional explanations for difficult course materials; and (d) negative stereotypes, such as issues with cultural differences around communication, all of which facilitated or hindered academic performance in online courses (Yeboah & Smith, 2016). In another study, 167 students described as mostly African American working adults were surveyed across six online courses about their confidence with technology and working online (Yu-Chun & Belland, 2016). Students indicated they felt more confident learning online when courses offered personalized interactions with content, the instructor, and their peers (Yu-Chun & Belland, 2016).

More recently, the U.S. Department of Education (2020) has required "regular and substantive interaction" (p. 54,748) between students and instructors for a course to

meet eligibility for financial aid. Interaction between students and the instructor is not only important, but also required in higher education for online courses. However, interaction can be interpreted in a wide range of ways, and what may work in some classes may not work in others.

Historically, faculty have resisted teaching online due to concerns that student engagement would suffer and additional time would be needed to develop online course materials as compared to face-to-face curriculum (Kono & Taylor, 2021; Wingo et al., 2017). An example of how additional time is needed in a completely asynchronous online format is how students and instructors need to negotiate new ways of communicating, which may be affected by various social, cultural, and economic factors. These factors include access to hardware like a laptop or mobile phone, internet, and bandwidth, which can affect one's ability to watch videos online. Whereas in a physical classroom, discussions may happen organically, online discussions need strategies to encourage student engagement. Although there are many approaches to designing asynchronous discussions, many instructors are either unaware of such engagement-supporting options or lack the time and support to implement them. Additionally, there are other equity issues to consider regarding engagement online, such as access to the internet, privacy, peer-to-peer interactivity, and engagement.

### ***Online Learning***

Enrollment in online courses has rapidly increased from 2012–2021 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Across the United States, enrollment in online courses in postsecondary institutions increased from 25.5% in 2012 to 72.8% in 2020 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b). In 2012 in Oregon, student enrollment in online

courses in postsecondary education was 8.9% and grew to 13.9% in 2019; by 2020, this enrollment had skyrocketed to 35.8% (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Although online enrollment rates from 2020 may be a result of universities moving online as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, students may also select online learning over face-to-face formats because they work multiple jobs, need to care for family members, or work full time and need flexibility offered by the structure of asynchronous learning. The flexibility offered by online learning may also be beneficial at urban universities and campuses where commuting takes up a large portion of time.

Online learning has the potential to offer access, flexibility, and at times, a more inclusive and accessible course experience than in-person learning. Salvo et al. (2019) asked 10 African American male students from Lamar University, a rural public university in Texas, about their experiences with online learning. Participants indicated “a preference for online courses because they did not feel judged by the color of their skin or the speed of their responses during discussions or in testing situations” (Salvo et al., 2019, p. 31). In a slightly larger study, 156 students from a biosciences program at a university in New Zealand were surveyed and indicated a preference for online learning, citing accessibility of resources, the opportunity to study from home, and a preference for learning via video so they could visualize and interact with complicated topics like learning about the immune system by rewatching videos on their own time (Montayre & Sparks, 2018).

Although a handful of studies have outlined the potential benefits of online learning, some data have indicated students may be less likely to succeed in online courses (Kaupp, 2012; Mead et al., 2020; Xu & Jaggars, 2020). Findings from a mixed

methods study suggested students who enrolled in online courses received lower grades than students who enrolled in the face-to-face version of the same course (Kaupp, 2012). Kaupp (2012) described the difference in grades between face-to-face and online courses, indicating there was a penalty for taking the online version of the course. Additionally, findings from Kaupp's study suggested the online penalty was worse for students who identified as Latine than for students who were white. Wanting to better understand the online penalty, Kaupp interviewed educators and administrators about why this online penalty might be higher for students who are Latine than their white peers. Instructors and staff indicated strong deficit assumptions about Latine students regarding their English language literacy, digital literacy, and motivation. Next, Kaupp interviewed Latine students, noting students delivered well-constructed responses, demonstrated comfort with technology, and had high levels of motivation toward learning—findings that contradicted instructor and staff perceptions about Latine students' English language literacy, digital literacy, and motivation. Kaupp indicated in his findings the deficit assumptions of Latine students held by educators were a contributing factor to inequitable educational outcomes in online courses (Lundberg et al., 2018). Kaupp's findings aligned with other researchers who indicated students receive higher grades in face-to-face courses compared with online courses (Mead et al., 2020; Xu & Jaggars, 2020).

Kaupp's (2012) findings suggested online learning may require different instructional approaches compared to face-to-face courses, such as additional time for caring, scaffolding, instructional design, and understanding students' comfort level collaborating online (Robinson et al., 2017). Importantly, some research suggests students of color have different needs in the context of online learning from their white



counterparts (Good et al., 2020; Kaupp, 2012; Salvo et al., 2019), such as teaching practices that are attuned to and support cultural ways of knowing, attention to varying cultural needs (e.g., relationship building), and recognition of how power and oppression are present and intersect in digital spaces. It is important to intentionally center BIPOC student experiences (Tuitt et al., 2018) to counter hidden curricular influences that reproduce educational inequities for students of color and to address representation in curriculum.

**Defining Online Learning.** There are several commonly used terms for online learning, including web-based, distance, e-learning, remote learning, online learning, and hybrid learning (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2011; Olapiriyakul & Scher, 2006). It is important to note each of these terms addresses the use of technology for learning; yet, each may have different connotations as far as timing, schedule, engagement, interaction, and feedback. Hybrid learning, for example, includes dual attendance where students meet in person and use technology to connect online. According to Olapiriyakul and Scher (2006), “The hybrid learning model is dependent upon the use of computers and network technology to support out-of-class instruction, similar to distance learning, and also encourages students to participate in class for rich content and discussion” (p. 289).

Remote learning was a term popularized and widely adopted in Spring 2020 to refer to face-to-face courses required to move into virtual formats in response to the worldwide spread of the COVID-19 virus. In my experience with remote courses, the remote format is most often a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences, meaning students may attend a live video session of a course or conduct

learning on their own in an asynchronous manner. Online courses, conversely, are courses built in advance with a significant amount of time devoted to designing online pedagogy for students. In my experience over the past 10 years building and working with instructors to design online courses, course development takes a minimum of 12 weeks and requires collaboration between the instructor and an instructional designer or another academic educator with a similar skillset. Instructors and instructional designers use this time to engage with new pedagogies that reflect best practices in online learning contexts and to create asynchronous teaching materials—such as recorded mini lectures, quizzes, or new course materials—with a focus on learner engagement and student–student and student–instructor interaction.

Although many, if not most colleges and universities, have operated online in some capacity since 2020, the intentional design of online learning environments remains a growing and rapidly evolving field. As a result of steady enrollment increases in online learning from 2012–2021 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021), the need to understand equity, justice, and inclusion in how these spaces are designed, taught, and redesigned for undergraduate students is urgent to provide all students with equitable and inclusive learning in higher education.

In the context of this study, I defined *online learning* as a learning experience that is online and asynchronous, where students access learning experiences through technology, there are no required class meeting times, and the instructor spends a significant amount of time engaging in relevant best practices for online learning and teaching (Moore et al., 2011). The context for this study was the asynchronous learning

environment to address the gap in existing scholarship that addresses inclusive pedagogies and representation in online spaces.

### *Study Site*

PSU, the site for this study, is a large urban public institution in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. PSU serves over 26,000 students, 61% of whom are enrolled full time, whereas 39% are enrolled part time (PSU, 2021b). A large percentage of PSU students commute to campus, hold jobs, and are parents, which may explain the number of part-time enrollments. PSU has a 20:1 student-to-faculty ratio, serves a student body that is 52% white, is noted for its commitment to sustainability, is celebrated for being welcoming and supportive of LGBTQ students, and is widely recognized for its commitment to service learning and student support (PSU, 2021c).

PSU is committed to expanding flexible pathways for students to meet the needs of the student population, who tend to be older (age 24+), working, and/or have family obligations (PSU, 2021c). From 2014–2020, PSU designed 180 online courses in collaboration with over 130 faculty partners and across academic disciplines (PSU, 2021c). PSU now hosts over 200 majors, minors, and certificates for students to choose from that are fully or mostly online (PSU, 2021c). Examples include bachelor's degrees in philosophy, business technology and analytics, liberal studies, science, social science, and arts and letters (PSU, 2021c). In this study, my coresearchers and I focused on the online learning environment at PSU. All data collection and collaboration were conducted virtually due to COVID-19 safety precautions.

## **Significance of the Problem**

A lack of representation and responsiveness may create learning experiences that demand students' assimilation to environments designed for dominant identities and may implicitly require a student to erase their culture, language, and diverse ways of knowing to succeed in class (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Valenzuela, 2005). Cocreation in higher education is an emerging area of scholarship aimed at addressing a lack of student representation and responsiveness through the active collaboration of students and instructors in the design of curricula. Cocreation is a nuanced practice in that it may look different depending on the context and those involved (Cook-Sather et al., 2018; Fielding, 2001). As there is only emerging scholarship regarding cocreation in the context of online learning, the rapid expansion of courses moved online generates a sense of urgency around representation and responsiveness of student perspectives in online learning environments.

## **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore student–instructor curriculum cocreation processes in the asynchronous online class environment. Goals of this work were to critically examine student–instructor relationships during the process of cocreating curriculum and to promote a change in current student roles in curricular decision making. This study was framed around the constructs of student voice, radical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, which collectively address power, positionality, democratic classrooms, reflexivity, resistance, and participation.

My goal in this research was not to conduct research *on* instructors or students, but instead to research *with* participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015). I sought to understand the nuances of cocreation (which I sometimes refer to as coconstruction), including instructor resistance toward equitable representation and responsiveness to student perspectives in curricula and how to collaboratively cocreate opportunities for learning. One important consideration for this study was the transition to online formats in 2020, which required many instructors to rapidly adapt curriculum to an entirely new learning context, which greatly affected the student experience (Kono & Taylor, 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021; Tice et al., 2021).

To best meet the goal of conducting research with instructors, I engaged with other coresearchers in participatory action research (PAR). As an approach to inquiry, PAR aligned with the goal of this research to generate new knowledge surrounding community needs by sharing power, engaging in collaborative decision making, and collectively analyzing data to determine findings (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Lykes et al., 2018).

## **Methods**

This study used PAR, a type of critical action research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as a methodological catalyst to empower instructors to share power and acknowledge students as holders and creators of knowledge and as democratic citizens who create and contribute to learning. The problem of representation and responsiveness is multilayered and has two different impacted populations: students and instructors.

I argued for instructors to be coresearchers in this study for the following reasons:

- Many instructors may want to engage in liberatory pedagogies and approaches to learning but are impeded by racist structures of predominantly white institutions (Dancy et al., 2018; Jackson & Labissiere, 2017).
- BIPOC and nonmale instructors have to constantly navigate institutional values that may be oppressive or unrepresentative of intersectional identities (hooks, 1994; Lykes, 2018; McGee, 2020; Tuitt et al., 2018).
- Curriculum development in modern university culture is the responsibility of the instructor; it may even be part of their union contract to create or build content for courses.

Centering instructors illuminated how faculty navigate institutional structures of racism within curriculum development and how they act in service of liberatory curricular change that centers students. Although students were not the coresearchers of this study, they were centered in this research in two important ways, the first being included through data collection methods (as interview participants), and the second as members of the advisory committee that advised the project team. Positioning instructors as coresearchers in this study was an initial step needed to build the necessary changes to curriculum development so students may equitably participate in the future. I discuss student involvement in this research more in Chapters 2 and 3.

PAR is research done in collaboration with others who have an invested interest in the problem being investigated (Herr & Anderson, 2015). PAR is a reflective process for researchers, grounded in the importance of the human experience and centered on active learning in the generation of knowledge (Guy et al., 2020; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Krueger-Henney & Ruglis, 2020). PAR in the field of education should allow participants to “name, understand and participate in the crucial developmental tasks confronted by societies” (Kemmis, 2006, p. 465). PAR can act as a form of resistance against historical approaches to education that demand assimilation to white ways of knowing for both instructors and students. Results from the practice of PAR can act as support for

educators to envision students as free and equal citizens (Guy et al., 2020; Kemmis, 2006). As Guishard (2009) noted, “PAR specifically aims to attend to the politics of knowledge production by problematizing and engaging in reflective dialog concerning whose ideas and viewpoints are traditionally privileged and excluded in research” (p. 87). Involving instructors as coresearchers in data collection and analysis allows for findings that are representative and responsive to the needs of a diverse community and for change at the institutional level.

In this study, instructors were coresearchers who cocreated research questions, determined methods, and conducted analysis of data collected. The project team of instructor coresearchers used researcher memos for reflection, an important part of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015), and instructor and student interviews to aid in answering the research questions. Researcher memos were written throughout the research process, and instructor and student interviews took place during the term each instructor taught a course as part of this study. At times I use the word faculty to refer to instructor coresearchers, other times I use instructors.

### **Research Questions**

For this study, the research team created the following questions:

1. What faculty perceptions, values, and challenges are present when transitioning to a coconstructed partnership model of learning that values culturally sustaining pedagogy?
2. How does the process of engaging in PAR inform faculty perspectives on the distribution of power between students and faculty within a coconstructed curriculum?
3. How do faculty describe the process and challenges of developing an asynchronous course to include components of culturally sustaining pedagogy, student coconstruction, and self-grading?
4. How does the process of student–faculty course coconstruction unfold for students and faculty in an asynchronous learning environment?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

I was motivated to lead this research for several reasons. First, I hold hopes and aspirations for a future that is more inclusive, a future that is coconstructed among communities that work together to find common solutions, and a future where higher education is a fundamental right and not a privilege for the wealthy. Throughout this process I listened, collaborated, learned, and grew. In reflecting on the privileged spaces I occupy, I want to fight for equity and equality, and I believe education has the potential to alter lives and change outcomes for generations to come. All deserve the opportunity to craft their future.

In this chapter, I review the conceptual framework, explore empirical and methodological literature, and, as online learning served as the context for this study and is not represented in the literature on student voice work, I offer data from a pilot study to better inform the problem of representation and responsiveness in online learning.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is a visual or written representation that explains central ideas and concepts in a study and the relationships between them (Maxwell, 2013). I used intersecting elements in the conceptual framework to inform my research design, help define and assess goals, develop realistic and relevant research questions, and identify potential validity or bias threats (Maxwell, 2013). I relied on several sources of information to construct my conceptual framework: my own experiential knowledge, existing theory and research, and outcomes from a pilot study (Maxwell, 2013). In this chapter, I outline three elements in the conceptual framework that informed this study: student voice, radical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy.



### *Student Voice*

Many attempts have been made to theorize student voice. One of the earlier definitions of student voice emerged from research by Fielding (2001) in *The Students as Researchers Project*, which took place in a secondary school setting in the United Kingdom from 1996–1999. The 3-year *Students as Researchers Project* was an initiative to have students identify issues they saw as important in their daily experiences in school. The project was facilitated by teachers, students, and faculty who collaborated to construct meaning and put forward recommendations for change to their fellow students and staff in the school.

In Year 2 of the project, students challenged the entire model of how curriculum was designed and delivered, urging “the school to acknowledge and incorporate their perspectives as students” (Fielding, 2001, p. 128), and argued for a negotiated curriculum and pedagogy where students had choices and agency in their learning. Fielding (2001) argued in the final project writeup for “a transformative, transversal approach in which the voices of students, teachers and others involved in the process of education construct ways of working that are emancipatory in both process and outcome” (p. 124). Of note in Fielding’s description of student voice work were the processes, roles, and outcomes for both students and teachers.

Fielding’s (2001) initial study indicated student voice work is not only about listening to students speak, but rather is a process that involves a negotiation of power relationships between students and instructors. Student voice work is a process that involves choice and agency for students and offers value for both students and instructors. Choices in learning offer students the opportunity to direct their learning,

such as choosing a type of format to submit for a project (e.g., essay, multimedia, slideshow), codetermining course outcomes, self-grading, or codetermining course projects to meet course outcomes. Choices in learning offer the instructor opportunities to learn about and from their students and best support student agency. The emerging description of student voice work from *The Students as Researchers Project* is consistent with, and similar to, previous approaches to K–12 learning originating in the 1970s, such as democratic schooling, cooperative learning, student agency, and student involvement (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). In sum, student voice work goes beyond listening, and what has emerged since the 1990s is more of a theoretical approach to student voice as action for both students and instructors in the curriculum in the literature. The theoretical approach to student voice work attempts to include both students and instructors and offers potential to address representation and responsiveness to student perspectives in curricula. In *The Students as Researchers Project*, students were supported by staff and teachers to conduct research and identify issues of importance, conduct research, and use the findings to improve school conditions. The students' recommendations resulted in changes to improve the school's assessment/profiling system, offer a better range of support for teachers in training, and more effectively teach students digital skills to support their learning (Fielding, 2001).

Cook-Sather (2006), a prominent educational researcher on student voice, defined student voice work as a process that requires power sharing between students and faculty in which students have legitimate perspectives and opinions related to learning and an active role in decision-making. Cook-Sather et al. (2018) described student voice as a term that “aims to signal not only the literal sound of students' words as they inform

educational planning, research, and reform, but also the collective contribution of diverse students' presence, participation and power in those processes" (pp. 2–3). Notable themes from Cook-Sather et al.'s description include power, positionality, and agency, which are similar themes from Fielding's efforts to theorize student voice in the literature.

Seale (2010), a well-known author on student voice work, offered a critique on the available student voice research in the literature and stated, "In higher education, the student voice literature is relatively silent on the issue of power relationships between teachers and students and therefore little consideration is given to issues such as equality and empowerment" (p. 997). For example, Seale noted one of the most commonly cited uses of student voice work in higher education is related to quality assurance for the purposes of evaluation and feedback. This usage is directly at odds with efforts to use student voice work to center student representation, rights, and democratic decision-making in the classroom (Seale, 2010). In her review of the literature on student voice, Seale (2010) noted, "The student voice is powerful and student voice work involves harnessing that power" (p. 997), linking listening to action. In Seale's conceptualization, student voice work is an active process by students and faculty, one that harnesses the power of students' experiences and voices to create opportunities for democracy and empowerment and could potentially disrupt a lack of representation and responsiveness to student perspectives.

As theorizations of student voice originated in the K–12 environment, student voice has often been misunderstood in higher education. Such misunderstandings have often resulted in conceptualizations by faculty, instructors, and administrators that are poorly constructed and are often misaligned with their intended outcomes (Seale, 2010).

For example, when student voice is narrowed to a form of quality assurance—such as end-of-term evaluations, something that can provide quantifiable indicators about how a class or university has improved on student success—results may benefit only the faculty and not students (Matthews et al., 2018; Seale, 2010).

Some variations of terminology in student voice work might be explained by what Seale (2010) described as a large mismatch in the literature between instructors and institutional aspirations to foster student voice work and actual classroom implementation. Seale's solution to address this gap was for instructors and institutions to engage in participatory approaches where researchers or educators have the initial idea for the research and classroom curriculum, and then involve the students in the planning, implementation, and decision-making processes. However, with so many different interpretations of and approaches to student voice work, student experiences may become essentialized in that students might be represented as a homogeneous group instead of as individual people with individual experiences that are different from one another (Ellsworth, 1989, Bovill et al., 2016). In my work with instructors, I have often seen the student experience essentialized when it comes to academic integrity and online learning; for example, some instructors assume all students who have the opportunity to cheat will do so. I often get questions from instructors I support related to how to create online settings to prevent cheating by shuffling quiz answers or questions, prevent students from seeing exam answers, or employ the use of surveillance or proctoring software.

Students' experiences can also be essentialized when it comes to race, ethnicity, or language (hooks, 1994; Paris, 2012). These experiences may manifest in deficit student views, for example when Spanish-speaking students are thought of as English-

deficient instead of Spanish-dominant. In addressing representation and responsiveness in curricula, student voice work must not view a single or modal student voice as representative of all student experiences and voices.

One area of consistency I found across definitions of student voice in the literature was critical to my own research—that the positionalities of the speaker and the listener are important when considering student voice (Alcoff, 1992; Fielding, 2001).

According to Alcoff (1992), positionality is connected to authority:

A speaker's location [referred to as social location, or social identity] has an epistemologically significant impact on the speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize or deauthorize one's speech. In particular, the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for. (p. 7)

Ultimately, a condition for transformative and liberatory dialogue can be achieved when the practice of speaking with others is centered as opposed to speaking to or about them. In doing student voice work, researchers must acknowledge the positionality of all actors as a critical component to the definition and the opportunity to reflect on each person's privileged social locations. I interpret Alcoff's (1992) statement to indicate that speaking and listening are positions of power. Speaking for someone has the potential to increase or reinforce someone's oppression. Positionality and power are critical components of the theorization of student voice work, which is mutually beneficial for both students and instructors, and agency and action for students. Acknowledging and addressing the power traditionally held by instructors by sharing that power and decision making with students can help connect the relevancy of the problem of a lack of representation and responsiveness in undergraduate curriculum.

**History of Student Voice Work.** Freire (1970) noted, “Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (p. 88). Freire argued the human voice is meant to be spoken and heard and suggested hearing implies action from those who listen. In action, there is a balance of power among listening, speaking, and taking action. The theorization of student voice outlines the activation of voice as a combination of listening, speaking, and action/resistance.

***Freire and Critical Pedagogy.*** During 6 years of political exile from Brazil, Freire (1970) wrote about critical consciousness, which he defined as “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). In the late 1960s and 1970s, Freire began to work with educators and community members on research tied to social action in response to community concern regarding oppression in schools, specifically as accessible only for those who held higher socioeconomic status, leaving communities in the lower socioeconomic strata without needed literacy skillsets to gain personally meaningful employment or a living wage. Community members gathered to hold discussions, question, critique, and ultimately create collective problem-solving strategies that were inclusive of whole communities (not those only with elite statuses) to resist oppressive conditions (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Together, members helped each other acquire literacy skills and helped each other engage in social critique and social action, elevating the status for many (Herr & Anderson, 2015). To this day, participatory research that challenges and questions authority is attributed to Freire’s educational activism and his writings on critical consciousness (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Freire's (1970) influence on the field of critical pedagogy and critical research practices focused on empowering individuals through reflection and the use of a critical lens (Kincheloe et al., 2017). According to Freire, the goal of the oppressed was to seek a "fuller humanity" and resist the dehumanization caused by oppression to demand and drive liberation. Yet, importantly, not all who are oppressed desire liberation. Freire (1970) described this phenomenon as the "fear of freedom" (p. 36) where oppressed peoples adopted the behaviors of those who oppressed them mostly as a survival response. Those with restricted or limited power are not always aware of this fear and may misconstrue efforts to help them access freedom or liberation as a threat or as unsafe (Freire, 1970). It is important to consider although a partnership between students and faculty attempts to change curriculum toward more democratic and self-directed learning, not all students will feel safe, comfortable, nor able to make these changes.

In a pilot study I conducted with colleagues in Fall 2020, we examined the challenges and benefits of a coconstructed partnership between students and instructors. We observed this fear of freedom at times among students being offered power through decision making over the course content and how they wanted to learn. Students regularly posed questions such as "Where am I required to show up for class?" when there were no required class sessions, or "What is the goal of reading a book for this class?" as opposed to reading the book for their own benefit. This suggested to us as researchers that students had a learned expectation that someone else would make the decisions about their education. When the fear of freedom showed up, it manifested in students seeking answers and direction from faculty instead of exercising their agency and choice about

when and how to direct their own learning goals in the class. Later in Chapter 2, I discuss the pilot in more detail.

***New Wave Student Voice Movement.*** Similar to the emergence of critical pedagogy as a reaction to oppression, a collective student effort arose in the 1990s as a “reaction against the traditional exclusion” (Cook-Sather, 2007, p. 391) of students from dialog and decision making in schooling. Although there has been research around student participation, involvement, and engagement for decades (Astin, 1984; Bastedo, 2012; Karp & Yoels, 1976; Kuh, 2010; Tinto, 1997), it was not until the 1990s that the theorization of student voice began to appear in the educational research literature. For example, student activist movements demanded representation in curriculum in the 1960s at the University of San Francisco and the University of California at Berkeley (UCB). This movement led to strikes by students and later set the groundwork at UCB for a transformational pedagogical movement where students collaborated with faculty and staff to write a manifesto calling for curricula that supported self-determination (Margolis, 2001).

During this time, students called for curriculum that was relevant to their home communities, resulting in the formation of the Chicano and Black studies programs (Margolis, 2001; Saul, 2022). In another more recent example at PSU in 2015, students of color organized a daylong event called “Students of Color Speak Out,” where they shared testimonials and demands for actions. These actions included a process to have ongoing conversations with faculty who are called out for racist practices, representation of ethnically diverse communities in classroom texts, and overall inclusion of student communities of color on campus (PSU, 2016). The event resulted in the creation of two



new cultural resource centers to serve the African/African American/Black and Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander student communities and presented the opportunity for instructors to hear from students about their experiences of exclusion in the classroom based on race and identity. Since the emergence of a formalized approach to the theorization of student voice work in the 1990s, there has been increasing interest in how to better serve students in higher education by defining practices related to student voice work that creates equitable learning for students (Bovill, 2020; Cates, 2018; de Bie et al., 2021; Ellsworth, 1989; Fielding, 2001; Ntem et al., 2020).

One impetus for increased research attention to student voice work from the 1990s to 2020s is Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), which stated a child has the right to have their voice heard in any matters that affect them, including education. As a result, several countries include student voice work at the national curriculum level, including the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. National efforts at student voice work have attempted to include students in curricular decision making and use inclusion of student voice in curriculum as a standard for evaluation (Cook-Sather, 2006). As of Spring 2022, the United States was the only United Nations member that did not subscribe to Article 12, citing the article's "potential to undermine adult authority" (Lundy, 2007, p. 928). Although many K–12 educators around the globe attempt to integrate student voice work in various forms, higher education has been slow to adopt findings and perspectives of student voice research.

**Conditions for Evaluating Student Voice Work.** The approaches to positioning students in roles that offer voice, agency, and action as outlined in student voice research

literature depend on the organizational culture and decision-making power in the educational institution (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2001). To address the varied institutional and school cultures, different approaches to student voice work may be needed. Fielding (2001) developed an evaluative framework through *The Students as Researchers Project* to guide educators with questions to consider as they begin to engage in curriculum design that aims to truly honor the theoretical underpinnings of student voice work (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Evaluating the Conditions for Student Voice*

---

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Speaking                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Who</i> is allowed to speak?</li> <li>• <i>To whom</i> are they allowed to speak?</li> <li>• <i>What</i> are they allowed to speak about?</li> <li>• What <i>language</i> is encouraged/allowed?</li> <li>• <i>Who decides</i> the answer to these questions?</li> <li>• <i>How</i> are those decisions made?</li> <li>• <i>How, when, where, to whom, and how often</i> are those decisions communicated?</li> </ul> |
| Listening                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Who</i> is listening?</li> <li>• <i>Why</i> are they listening?</li> <li>• <i>How</i> are they listening?</li> </ul>  |
| Skills                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the skills of dialogue <i>encouraged and supported</i> through training or other appropriate means?</li> <li>• Are those skills understood, developed, and practiced within the <i>context of democratic values and dispositions</i>?</li> <li>• Are those skills themselves <i>transformed</i> by those values and dispositions?</li> </ul>   |
| Attitudes and Dispositions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do those involved <i>regard each other</i>?</li> <li>• To what degree are the <i>principle of equal value</i> and the <i>dispositions of care</i> felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter?</li> </ul>  |
| Systems                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How often</i> does dialogue and encounter occur in which student voice is centrally important occur?</li> <li>• <i>Who decides</i>?</li> </ul>  |

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
|                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or <i>relate to other organizational arrangements</i> (particularly those involving adults)?</li> </ul>   |
| Organizational Culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the <i>cultural norms and values</i> of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement?</li> <li>• Do the <i>practices, traditions and routine daily encounters</i> demonstrate values supportive of student voice?</li> </ul> |
| Spaces                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Where</i> are the public spaces (physical and metaphorical) in which these encounters might take place?</li> <li>• Who <i>controls</i> them?</li> <li>• What <i>values</i> shape their being and their use?</li> </ul>  |
| Action                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What <i>action</i> is taken?</li> <li>• Who feels <i>responsible</i>?</li> <li>• <i>What happens</i> if aspirations and good intentions are not realized?</li> </ul>   |
| The Future             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we need <i>new structures</i>?</li> <li>• Do we need <i>new ways of relating to each other</i>?</li> </ul>  |

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*Note.* Reprinted with permission “Students as Radical Agents of Change” by M. Fielding, 2001, *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(2), pp. 123–141. Copyright 2001 by Journal of Educational Change.

In evaluating the conditions for student voice, Fielding’s (2001) questions addressed power in terms of speaking, listening, attitudes, systems, culture, spaces, action, and the future (see Table 1). Reflective questions for educators were offered as a tool for checking in on implicit bias and how institutional culture may permeate curriculum. Evaluating the conditions for student voice (see Table 1) was an important tool used in reflection with instructors in this study that I review more in the procedures section of Chapter 3. Although student voice work has the potential to be transformative for both students and instructors, such efforts runs the risk of essentializing student experiences. To address the risk of essentialization, I engaged with two additional approaches to learning: radical pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

### ***Radical Pedagogy***

Heavily influenced by critical pedagogy and Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, radical educators believe students are creators of their own learning (Giroux, 1986). Radical educators call for the democratization of learning environments to counter what Freire labeled transactional/banking education, or the expectation that students will sit back and receive their education. Students, according to radical educators, are equal to teachers as contributors in the classroom, and the practice of radical pedagogy should center student voices and push back against the systems and structures that prohibit democratic relations in the classroom (Giroux, 1986; Sweet, 1998). According to Sweet (1998), "Radical pedagogy requires adopting alternative grading practices, cultivating classroom dialogue, relegating considerable power to students, and promoting social activism as part of class expectations" (p. 100).

Radical pedagogy suggests schools are sites of possibility that may often be experienced as sites of struggle for many students (Giroux, 1986; hooks, 1994; Love, 2019). Radical pedagogy is a "theory of politics and culture that analyzes discourse and voice as a continually shifting balance of resources and practices in the struggle over specific ways of naming, organizing, and experiencing social reality" (Giroux, 1986, p. 60). Taken in context, Giroux (1986) suggested those whose voices are heard and honored can signal defining and legitimizing lived experiences, while at the same time can also represent a power struggle among different groups "over what will count as meaningful and whose cultural capital will prevail in legitimating particular ways of life" (p. 50). The concept of voice as described by Giroux prompts educators to consider positionality and privilege that may be hidden in curriculum, for example, by posing

questions such as, “Who is allowed to speak?,” “Who decides who speaks?,” or “If someone is speaking, who is listening?” These questions are aligned with Fielding’s (2001) prompts for educators to consider when embarking on student voice work in curriculum (see Table 1).

One area in curriculum radical educators have sought to address is neoliberalism (Giroux, 2002). As a result of an economic crisis in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. public was unhappy with government regulation of the economy; as a result, the concept of neoliberalism gained in popularity. Neoliberalism assumes that in the absence of government regulation, free markets will self-regulate and offer the ideal allocation of resources and opportunities to individuals, who are motivated by self-interest (Olssen & Peters, 2007). Neoliberalism is the embodiment of prioritizing profit over people and has heavily influenced political economic frameworks that favor private interests, markets, and trade (Gyamera & Burke, 2017). Neoliberalism discourse has become normalized in governmental policies affecting education and represent the white/anglo perspective supporting individualism, competition, and reliance on the market (Giroux, 2002; Gyamera & Burke, 2017).

Through the lens of radical pedagogy, “neoliberal foundations inform the ways in which different types of information are valued, with knowledge that conforms to neoliberal agendas being more appreciated because of their [neoliberal agenda] capacity to generate revenue and prestige” (Museus & LePeau, 2020, p. 216). To define classrooms as democratic spaces or spaces of resistance against these kinds of neoliberal influences, educators engaging in radical pedagogy call for power to be deconstructed in the classroom (Giroux, 1986; Museus & LePeau, 2020; Sweet, 1998). One such effort in

deconstructing power in the classroom is the positioning of students-as-partners in coconstruction of course materials (Cook-Sather, 2006; Cook-Sather et al., 2018; Matthews et al., 2018; Seale et al., 2015). Partnerships can happen when students and faculty collaborate in the design of a course curriculum before the course starts or with all students in the course once the term begins. The students-as-partners approach to coconstructing curriculum with instructors offers opportunities to address such inequities that result from within institutions influenced by neoliberalism and can position students as creators of learning. I discuss specific partnership examples later in this chapter.

Power is an important theme to mention in terms of radical pedagogy and in relation to the lack of representation and responsiveness in online curricula. Taylor and Robinson (2009) discussed radical pedagogy and Foucault's conceptualization of power in relation to student voice, stressing "where there is power there will be resistance and transgression" (p. 171). Feminist practices call for power *with* instead of power *over* the student, reflecting a theorization of students and faculty as partners in student voice work (Cook-Sather, 2007; Taylor & Robinson, 2009). As Sleeter and Stillman (2005) noted, "In other words, teachers and students learn their place in hierarchical power relationships through the degree of power they have over selecting, organizing, and teaching or learning curriculum" (p. 29). Power is a critical theme in this research for how instructors interpret their positionality in the classroom and value student voice work.

An example of educational inequity and a signal of unequal power dynamics in the classroom is when "a predetermined and hierarchically arranged body of knowledge is taken as the cultural currency to be dispensed to all [students] regardless of their

diversity and interests” (Giroux, 1986, p. 51). When instructors provide a curriculum with no explanation for how the content is selected, whose interests it represents, or why students may be interested in acquiring it, the histories, experiences, cultures, and language of students are silenced (Giroux, 1986). My experience as a practitioner in online education, having designed hundreds of online courses to support faculty, confirms many online courses are designed in advance, with little consideration of specific student experiences, cultures and languages, or direct input from students.

Using radical pedagogy as a lens, students as partners work requires that students and faculty engage in dialogue and create classrooms as democratic spaces. Without a radical, democratic lens—or more specifically, without instructors sharing power with students and doing work to understand and interrogate their own power—the practice of coconstructing online curricula may become a practice that reinforces and maintains existing educational inequities instead of disrupting them (Taylor & Robinson, 2009).

**The Hidden Curriculum.** Traditionally in higher education, instructors hold power to decide what counts as legitimate knowledge and how that knowledge is negotiated in the classroom. When instructors use their power to reinforce existing social and cultural inequalities that reproduce hegemonic values, a form of hidden curriculum is created (Apple & King, 1977; Giroux, 1979). Hidden curriculum is when the officially stated curriculum is described as equitable and inclusive by the university or institution and instructors do not provide those opportunities for all students (Sambell & McDowell, 2006). For example, high-level administrators claim PSU is “a model of academic excellence through the achievement of equitable outcomes, culturally responsive curriculum, and an innovative, engaging and student-centered pedagogy” (PSU, 2021a,

para. 1), yet there are little-to-no data to demonstrate how inclusive pedagogy is achieved in online education.

There are also few examples of what equitable outcomes or student-centered pedagogy look like, or universal support for instructors and faculty to design their courses to align with these goals. When online courses at PSU are built without direct intention toward student-centered learning, and without attention to having a culturally responsive curriculum or attention to innovation and engagement, instructors potentially reinforce various forms of hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1990). Additionally, there is a level of inequity built into the claim of inclusive curriculum, as adjunct instructors are not compensated (compared to faculty who may be compensated) for the additional time to spend on professional development needed to design a course to be student centered with a focus on equity, inclusion, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. The concept of a hidden curriculum provides context for exploring power relationships in the online classroom and how instructors negotiate building democratic spaces in online curricula.

**The Neoliberal University.** From a neoliberal perspective, schools are businesses, and students are customers (Matthews et al., 2018; Museus & LePeau, 2020; Olssen & Peters, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2019). Revenue generation is the central goal. Neoliberal influences can be noted in the classroom when increasing enrollment dollars related to class size ratios of number of students per instructor is prioritized over learning goals related to student engagement.

In the field of education, neoliberal influences erode the intent of education to further public service and instead link education to corporate needs by prioritizing profit over the needs of students and instructors. Neoliberalism in education results in higher



education funneling a flow of wealth, opportunity, and power to a small elite few (Andeotti, 2016; Sleeter, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2019). The neoliberal university presents several challenges to the goal of social justice in higher education: neoliberalism is intertwined with systemic forms of oppression, mainly white supremacy and heteronormativity, both which aim to further the advantages of the white, straight, middle-class men (Museus & LePeau, 2020; Souto-Manning, 2019).

At times, the neoliberal agenda is so embedded in higher education that even work intended to advance equity can inadvertently reify the very systems universities aim to disrupt (Museus & LePeau, 2020). For example, Matthews et al. (2018) interviewed senior leaders at a research-focused university in Australia and found that despite institutional efforts to address student engagement and inclusion, these efforts still ended up reinforcing neoliberal agendas. Specifically, Matthews et al. (2018) noted faculty expressed feelings of resistance toward student voice work by citing job security and academic agency, which led some institutions to attempt to standardize partnership approaches across the institution—a practice that does not support mutuality in learning partnerships. Leaders also mentioned the perception it was easier to build student voice work outside the classroom rather than into curricula and assessment practices, indicating it was easier to place students in positions related to governance (e.g., committee work) and quality assurance (students as a data source; no agency) than to begin the work of transformation change related to learning (Matthews et al., 2018). Governance and quality assurance suggestions for student voice work guide institutions toward a one-shot approach to partnership, which has the potential to erase the collaborative nature of the work. Matthews et al.'s findings indicated university leaders essentialized the student

experience in terms of profit-seeking by going for the easy route, positioning students as a data source (Fielding, 2001) as opposed to equal contributors whose role is to consume knowledge as opposed to asset-based strategies that indicate students are bringers and holders of knowledge (Matthews et al., 2018). Specifically for radical pedagogical theorists, such as those influenced by Freire, the positioning of students as knowledge consumers runs counter to the aim of honoring the knowledge students hold and bring as valued contributors (Bernal, 2002; Fielding, 2001).

The entrance of online education on the higher education “market” appeared to be a revenue-generating model designed to increase the profitability and privatization of education (Reyes & Segal, 2019). Take the for-profit, fully online University of Phoenix-Arizona, which in 2017 had 103,975 students enrolled full time, a number nearly three times some state university student enrollments (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Although opportunity and access to online higher education and predatory recruitment of lower socioeconomic populations are important issues for research, I raise the example of for-profit online institutions to highlight competing perspectives on online education—among them, easy revenue sources versus as opportunities to pursue inclusion and social justice.

Although online education has the potential to strengthen global ties, raise consciousness, and pursue social justice, it can simultaneously be leveraged as a tool for continued prioritization of profit over people to the benefit of those already in power (Reyes & Segal, 2019). Reyes and Segal (2019) argued students enrolled in online programs under the regime of neoliberalism are forced into a transactional encounter with the university. The university positions the student to focus on the market value of their

degree rather than on the value in education as a service to community knowledge and the betterment of society. In considering Reyes and Segal's argument, one could make the argument that face-to-face courses are also transactional, which leaves the reader to infer some difference between the curriculum—or, in online learning, online versus learning in person.

The purpose of education, according to Reyes and Segal (2019), is to provide opportunities for students to advance critical thinking and not simply conform to dominant ideas presented to them in their coursework. To confront neoliberal forces in online education, Reyes and Segal (2019) called for the needs of students to drive the design and delivery of online courses to achieve personalization of the materials, which is to say online curricula can be inclusive, engaging, and counter neoliberal effects present in higher education.

In sum, personalization and flexibility are needed to meet diverse student needs and create opportunities for students to make meaningful connections in course content. To address diverse representation and responsiveness to student perspectives and to push back against the presence of neoliberal forces in higher education, educators need intentional, inclusive strategies for online teaching that are required for all instructors.

*Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*

[I face] A lot of racism and stereotypes from students and professors. I just assume that it's part of the school so I don't bother reporting. Don't feel like my voice would be taken seriously. Even though the school tells us.

—Student participant (Jackson & Labissiere, 2017, p. 113)

A student of color noted their experience with racism at PSU in the *African American, African, and Black Student Success Task Force Report* that addressed supporting and serving the African American/African/Black community at PSU (Jackson & Labissiere, 2017). What I found particularly significant about this quote was even if a student were to be invited to exercise their voice, they may choose not to do so when the environment is not supportive nor responsive to what they have to say. The invitation alone is not enough. In this report, which was charged with assessing the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for PSU in continuing to serve the African American/African/Black community at PSU, this student's experience was reported alongside similar stories that described what experiencing racism looks like. Students discussed experiencing racism in the form of programs with no underserved or underrepresented student peers, never having an instructor who looked like them (e.g., no Black female architecture professors), lack of representation in graduate programs, not having access to advisors who were BIPOC who could advise on best pathways for graduation and graduate-level work, difficulty finding scholarship information, and lack of representation in the curriculum (Jackson & Labissiere, 2017).

Representation matters. Students from underrepresented groups have lower graduation rates when they do not have peers and instructors who match their own racial

backgrounds (Bowman & Denson, 2021). Booker (2016) reported that female African American students who attended a predominantly white institution where curricula did not represent their perspectives or experiences:

Discussed feelings of isolation, separation, and fatigue from race representation.

[These] students frequently mentioned loneliness while in their courses and not wanting to always have to defend their race or correct some misperception from faculty and/or students. The constant weight of being “other” and not being fully integrated into the life of the course was difficult for students. (p. 224)

In short, representation in curriculum matters.

The omission of histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of students of color from the design and development of online curriculum reflects a form of erasure that favors white perspectives over those of BIPOC students. This form of erasure is not always limited to online curriculum development as students are rarely involved in developing undergraduate curriculum for hybrid and in person courses (Bovill et al., 2016). The omission of multicultural perspectives in online curriculum is of particular concern given the rapid expansion of online learning and the preexisting educational inequities for students of color (Xu & Jaggars, 2014). In the context of online learning, students rarely engage in the design of the class materials, course outcomes, or course assignments, opportunities that might counter the curricular erasure described. Given these concerns, I chose culturally sustaining pedagogy as an important part of my conceptual framework.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy builds on decades of educational research and theorizing in culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, which

centers and calls for the legitimization of the knowledge and experiences of students of color in the classroom (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). As culturally sustaining pedagogy is built on the prior frameworks of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, I review those perspectives and then discuss culturally sustaining pedagogy in more detail.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.** Often, there is a mismatch between a student's home culture and the values taught and reinforced in the classroom. Scholars have described and labeled this mismatch in different ways. Valenzuela (2005) named this mismatch *subtractive schooling*, where school personnel require students to assimilate to dominant culture in the classroom by divesting students of their biculturalism and bilingualism. This deficit practice can be seen when students are labeled as "limited English proficient rather than as Spanish dominant" (Valenzuela, 2005, p. 272). By doing so, subtractive schooling disregards students' cultural identities and disrupts progress toward bilingualism. As a result, "students' cultural identities are systematically derogated and diminished" (Valenzuela, 2005, p. 267), ultimately affecting students' overall achievement in school.

Tuck and Yang (2012) noted Native people achieve academic success when the curriculum is in their home languages; however, most Native American and Alaska Native peoples are taught in English-speaking schools with teachers who know little about students' home communities. As a result, Indigenous populations are often labeled as "at risk" of failing school (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Tuck and Yang (2012) instead called for a process of decolonization of the curricula and argued school personnel must provide students access to instructional materials in their home languages and acknowledge the

history of enslavement of Indigenous people in the United States and offer reparations for Native communities.

In reviewing the state of California's History-Social Science Standard Framework and Standards, Sleeter and Stillman (2005) noted proficiency in the English language is used as a gatekeeping tool and that history lessons negate the family knowledge of students from Mexican and Indigenous descent. Standards imposed on curricula signal "who has a right to define what schools are for, whose knowledge has most legitimacy, and how the next generation should think about the social order and their place within it" (Pindi, 2020, p. 293). Subtractive schooling, decolonizing the curriculum, and standardizing English as a success metric are all attempts to describe when home values and culture are not represented nor valued in the curriculum.

In response to the research finding that academically successful African American students were only able to succeed at the expense of their cultural well-being, Ladson-Billings (1995) began a process of collaborative and reflexive research to define and recognize pedagogy that was culturally relevant for students. Ladson-Billings (1995) conducted research to understand the pedagogy and practices of eight exemplary teachers of African American students and found these teachers made a conscious effort to take part in and combine the communities of their students in the curriculum.

Specifically, teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy believe all students are capable of academic success; are ingrained in and are part of the community of their students; view knowledge as a shared, constructed process; and help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant pedagogy scholarship has largely focused on K–12 education and has

demonstrated how the inclusion of culture and community—such as hip-hop pedagogies, valuing oral histories and traditions in the classroom, and relationship building among peers and between students and instructors—can be a catalyst for addressing inequities in education (Hammond, 2016; Knight-Manuel et al., 2016).

**Culturally Responsive Teaching.** According to Gay (2013), “Education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-school living; promote educational equity and excellence; create community among individuals from different cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds; and develop students’ agency, efficacy, and empowerment” (p. 49). Overarchingly, culturally relevant teaching acknowledges student’s lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and performance styles as needed and necessary elements to make learning relevant (Gay, 2013) and can increase academic achievement for ethnically diverse student populations (Gay, 2002).

Although at times, the terms culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching are used interchangeably (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally relevant pedagogy involves teaching practices, and culturally responsive teaching is more of a formal plan for teaching (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teachers can determine multicultural strengths and limitations of curriculum and instructional materials and will make the needed changes to promote the study of a spectrum of ethnic groups (Gay, 2002; Hammond, 2016). Culturally responsive teachers can contextualize issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender and value multiple forms of knowledge and meaning making (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teachers are also critically aware of the power of symbols that are used to teach students about knowledge, skills, morals, and values (Gay, 2002). Symbols might include images, awards,



celebrations, and positionality (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teachers leverage the curriculum as a tool to promote ethnic and cultural diversity while remaining cognizant and critical of how various racial groups and lived experiences are portrayed in popular culture (Gay, 2002). To build culturally responsive communities of learning, students are taught about “their cultural heritage and positive ethnic identity development along with math, science, reading, critical thinking, and social activism” (Gay, 2002, p. 110).

Learning is an active process and students in a culturally responsive learning community are inspired to take action to promote “freedom, equality, and justice for everyone” (Gay, 2002, p. 110).

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0.** Culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, although different from one another, share the aim centering students of color as agents of their own learning (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), also called culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0 in scholarly literature (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Peña-Sandoval, 2017), builds on culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching and adds several new elements for educators that are needed to make further gains toward social justice. For example, Paris and Alim (2017) called for a pedagogy not centered on whiteness, a pedagogy that demands an emancipatory vision of schooling. This vision critiqued oppressive systems in schools, rather than Black, Brown, and Indigenous students. As Paris and Alim (2017) noted, “The term relevant does not do enough to explicitly support the goals of maintenance and social critique” (p. 4). Educators who are “relevant” may fall short on critiquing dominant power structures and continuing the practice of sustaining cultural practices of communities of color. A central goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy is to foster and

sustain cultural pluralism in practice for both students and teachers and to resist the hegemonic centering of white experiences and values (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). The difference from relevant and responsive pedagogies is that culturally sustaining pedagogy is ultimately about a “shifting culture of power” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 5).

The overarching goals of CSP include addressing social inequalities and preparing students for meaningful lives outside the classroom through dynamic participation in a democracy, both of which were important considerations in this research (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). Researchers might also consider, “how might understandings of culturally sustaining pedagogies be enhanced if they were informed by teaching practices developed, implemented, and refined by the students themselves?” (Irizarry, 2017, p. 120). As a teaching praxis, CSP has the potential to include cocreation as a critical practice of shifting power from instructors to students.

The problem of representation in the curriculum could be addressed by applying a culturally relevant pedagogical approach; the solution is to design curriculum representative of diverse identities and experiences. For this research, I wanted to engage with a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach. Therefore, it was important to consider the role of the instructor and their responsiveness to student perspectives, including how students are involved in the curriculum design, how this involvement and their contributions sustain a connection to their communities, and how to address the inevitable issues that arise when decentering whiteness. In assessing the problem of representation and responsiveness to student perspectives, students and instructors should mutually benefit from a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach to curriculum design.

There are barriers to implementing CSP in higher education. It may be difficult at times for instructors who are reluctant to engage in the redistribution of knowledge, power, and privilege to embrace culturally sustaining pedagogical practices (Gay, 2013). Additionally, instructors may want to engage in increased representation and responsiveness in curriculum by engaging in culturally sustaining practices but may not know how (Heitner & Jennings, 2016).

### **Synthesis of the Conceptual Framework**

Each element of the conceptual framework provided a perspective from which to interpret the problem of representation and responsiveness in curriculum. Used alone, each element provided an incomplete vantage point for examining this problem. I compiled all three theoretical perspectives together in a matrix (see Table 2), so the research team could make connections among the constructs, applications, and potentially flawed assumptions to mitigate potential risks attributed to the consideration of using only one approach. Potential risks include: (a) power sharing is left up to the instructor, (b) coconstruction ends up centering already privileged identities, (c) coconstruction centers the instructor instead of the student, (d) liberation for historically excluded student populations is not addressed, (e) student experiences are essentialized, and (f) systems of oppression in higher education are not interrogated nor challenged. Taken together, student voice work, radical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy offer a useful window through which to examine the problem of representation and responsiveness and mitigate limitations within existing understandings of the problem of representation and responsiveness (see Table 2). To address and mitigate risks associated

with this work, I have incorporated themes from the conceptual framework (i.e., power sharing, democracy, and reflection on positionality) into the research design.

The conceptual framework matrix provides a brief synopsis for each theoretical perspective to orient the reader to how constructs and potentially flawed assumptions fit within the study. The matrix provides an understanding of what the application of each theoretical perspective looks like in relation to the problem and how each perspective frames the entire study. Additionally, limitations for applying one construct without the other are outlined.

**Table 2**

*Conceptual Framework Matrix*

| Student voice work                 | Application   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Overview                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Approach to achieving transformational/liberating learning experiences by providing value, agency, and action with students in their education.</li> </ul>                               |
| Constructs                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Power</li> <li>● Power-sharing</li> <li>● Positionality</li> <li>● Coconstruction</li> <li>● Mutually beneficial to students and instructors</li> </ul>                                  |
| Considerations                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Power sharing in higher education is still left up to instructors</li> <li>● Coconstruction can end up re-centering already privileged identities</li> </ul>                             |
| Potentially flawed assumptions     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If students are presented with the opportunity to exercise their voice in the classroom, they are safe/valued to do so.</li> <li>● All students want to exercise their voice.</li> </ul> |
| Risks of using student voice alone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Risk essentializing student cultural experiences</li> </ul>  |

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Application to problem          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student voice work leverages power-sharing between the student/instructors so students are represented within the curriculum through the use of their voices, enacted through exercising agency and taking action.</li> <li>● Instructors respond to student perspectives within a shared partnership approach to curriculum where students wield decision-making power over certain elements within the curriculum.</li> </ul> |
| Application to data collection  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student and instructor interview questions and researcher memos reflect themes of power and positionality.</li> </ul>   |
| Application to research methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Examine interview transcripts for language that speaks to power, power-struggles, power-sharing, resistance, and positionality, and mutual benefit.</li> </ul>  |

| Radical pedagogy                      | Application   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Overview                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Approach to learning that centers student voices to create democratic classrooms through a critique of structures and systems that limit democracy in the classroom.</li> </ul>  |
| Constructs                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Democracy</li> <li>● Power</li> <li>● Power-struggle</li> <li>● Positionality</li> <li>● Neoliberal influences</li> </ul>  |
| Considerations                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● May not be safe for some identities to resist and/or participate in democratic classrooms.</li> </ul>  |
| Potentially flawed assumptions        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If students are presented with democratic learning opportunities, then liberation for all is achieved.</li> <li>● Resistance to neoliberalism has no consequences.</li> </ul>  |
| Risks of using radical pedagogy alone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Centers the instructor who makes all decisions and holds power over students</li> <li>● Does not address liberation for many student populations historically excluded in higher education.</li> </ul>   |
| Application to problem                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Radical pedagogy leverages democratic teaching strategies to push back against neoliberal influences and deficit approaches in higher education to better represent diverse student populations in curriculum by repositioning students as creators of learning.</li> <li>● Instructors respond to student perspectives using the construct of power/power struggle to indicate whose voice is heard/valued in the curriculum by considering their own positionality and power and how they may be unintentionally reinforcing hidden curriculum.</li> </ul> |

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Application to data collection  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student and instructor interview questions and researcher memos reflect themes of power power-sharing, and democracy.</li> </ul> |
| Application to research methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine interview transcripts for language that speaks to democratic decision-making, resistance, and positionality.</li> </ul>  |

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| Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) | Application  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Overview                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach to learning that centers and seeks to sustain the cultural, linguistic, and community wealth of knowledge of students.</li> </ul>  |
| Constructs                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural and linguistic pluralism</li> <li>• Resistance to monolingualism</li> <li>• Resistance to deficit student approaches to learning</li> <li>• Democracy</li> <li>• Mutually beneficial to students and instructors</li> </ul>  |
| Considerations                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily focused on K–12 classrooms</li> <li>• At times, power sharing is largely left up to instructors</li> </ul>  |
| Potentially flawed assumptions       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resisting deficit student approaches is straightforward/easy.</li> <li>• Resistance to white-centering is straightforward.</li> </ul>   |
| Risks of using culturally CSP alone  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk essentializing student cultural experiences.</li> <li>• Systems of oppression within higher education not necessarily interrogated.</li> </ul>   |
| Application to problem               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally sustaining pedagogy centers students' cultural, linguistic, and community knowledge to intentionally honor different ways of knowing and to resist deficit student approaches to learning to directly address representation in the curriculum.</li> <li>• Instructors respond to student perspectives through the resistance of a monolingual, white society and by encouraging coconstruction and democracy in the classroom.</li> </ul> |
| Application to data collection       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student and instructor interview questions and researcher memos reflect themes from one's lived experiences and positionality.</li> </ul>   |
| Application to research methods      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine interview transcripts for language that speaks to cultural inclusion, cultural centering, resistance, and positionality.</li> </ul>   |

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## **Critique of the Framework**

The conceptual framework may have obscured data in this study due to the amount of interpretation in each theoretical perspective related to power, democracy, resistance, and power sharing. Instructors could have refused, resisted, or minimized authentic exploration of power and power sharing in terms of their own positionality, which would have made it difficult to study their cocreation processes. For example, if an instructor interpreted resistance from students as something they must control and responded by limiting choices and restricting learning for students, the data to understand cocreation would not be valid, as no coconstruction would have taken place. The research team would have subsequently struggled to study any of the themes from the conceptual framework. Although the conceptual framework could have obscured data in this study, all instructors in this research chose to authentically share power with students, albeit to different degrees. In Chapter 4, I discuss findings from the study and how instructors shared power with students.

Another way the conceptual framework could have obstructed data was due to the amount of information in each element. My intentions in building the conceptual framework were for each of the three elements to support each other and to address limitations from the others. Due to the amount of information related to each element, each element could have overwhelmed and blurred considerations from the other.

Another factor to consider that affected this study was the limited amount of literature on student voice, radical pedagogy, or culturally sustaining pedagogy in the context of online learning in higher education. As instructors have concerns about

perceived barriers to student success in the online environment (Wingo et al., 2017), it was difficult to argue for the use of one of these approaches with limited literature in support of their application and to apply them to the context of online learning. Literature from the scholarship of online learning may have directed instructors away from efforts toward sharing power, as educational technology inherently is designed to have the teacher at the head of the classroom. Although approaches to teaching are largely up to the instructors teaching the course, and instructors may elect opportunities for democracy, educational technology is most often designed for instructors to be in power and to restrict and arguably undermine the goals of power sharing and coconstruction with their students. Specifically, learning management systems do not have settings that allow students to grade themselves or others, and students cannot easily add or contribute to course content.

It is important to consider how, without supporting literature, an instructor will proceed when or if a student exercises their voice or agency to reinforce dominant dynamics of privilege. For example, in group work assignment, white students take the lead, thereby dominating the conversation, and dismissing or silencing the ideas and experiences of students with intersectional identities. Instructors may in turn argue that students who have been historically excluded in higher education choose not to participate, engage, or contribute at the level of their peers. This argument might be used to legitimize and reinforce white experiences while claiming to be attending to the student voice (Cook-Sather, 2006) and supporting culturally sustaining pedagogy. If instructors do not spend time to understand how power, power sharing, resistance, and positionality affect cocreation in curriculum, it will reinforce existing inequities for



students, thereby negating the purpose of the conceptual framework. Additionally, publishing about student voice work and culturally sustaining pedagogy without due attention to power, power sharing, resistance, and positionality would be irresponsible and harmful, as harmful findings could be replicated by others who seek to engage in this work.

Instructors should note there are times when students want more structure and guidance and times when students want more freedom and flexibility to make their own choices in their learning, which may be confusing for instructors who seek a one-size-fits-all approach. Implementing a PAR methodology in this study served to address how cocreation would happen in the curriculum, the one-size-fits-all concerns, and worries about how to respond to minimizing white narratives and experiences in the online curricula. Additionally, this study added to the scholarly literature regarding student voice, radical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy in the context of online learning in urban public education.

### **Empirical Review of the Scholarly Literature**

In the context of curriculum design, student–instructor partnerships offer collaborative roles where both partners cocreate the curriculum. For example, in a student’s-as-partners model, students are paired with instructors for a period of time, such as a quarter or semester (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013). As Cook-Sather and Agu (2013) noted, “Each week the consultant [student partner] observes her faculty partner’s classroom, shares her observation notes, and meets with her partner to discuss what is working well and what might be revised” (p. 273). From 2006–2012, Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges partnered 150 faculty with 90 students, 46 of whom were students of

color or international students. In a qualitative review of 16 self-identified students of color from this group, partnership models between students and faculty were found to “build counterspaces to affirm identity, share experiences, and to offer active co-producer roles with the potential for transformation” (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013, pp. 274–275). Through this process, students of color shared their perspectives that being positioned in this way affirmed their identities and they felt their perspectives were valued as “legitimate and important” (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013, p. 276) so they felt empowered in their lives beyond just work on their respective projects.

A faculty member of color who participated in the Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges partnership process felt repositioning students of color benefitted the students who were enrolled in her class and also reshaped her own sense of participation in her role as a teacher and educator (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013). For white faculty, the partnership program offered an opportunity “to access and learn from the experiences and perspectives of students of color” (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013, p. 279). This finding tied into the work of Cook-Sather and Agu (2013), who described the development of speaking and listening between students and faculty and with people of color as an important dimension of culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Partnership with a student (who is not enrolled in the course) and before a course is taught offers instructors the opportunity to affirm and sustain identities, experiences, and knowledge of students of color by creating asset practices (e.g., cultural identity building) that build toward a humanizing pedagogy and counterspaces (Cook-Sather & Agu, 2013). However, the partnership model of a single student with a single instructor may also present concerns regarding accessibility and equity. For example, Bovill (2020)

suggested a critique of the single student with faculty member coconstructive partnership model and outlined how there is potential to only “involve students [in the cocreation of curriculum] who are already engaged or advantaged in some way, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities” (p. 6). This critique suggested partnerships where students act as consultants in cocreation are reserved for only a privileged few (Bovill, 2020); thus, a consultancy model of student–instructor partnerships may in some cases offer a counternarrative to center voices of those already in power, or it may offer a reproduction of existing power dynamics under the guise of equity student voice work.

To address potential inequities in how students are selected for cocreation, Bovill (2020) suggested involving the whole class in the process of cocreation; yet, a whole-class model calls for a shift in how instructors teach and learn, and instructors already have concerns that teaching online takes too much time and they do not receive adequate support for professional development necessary to teach in online environments (Wingo et al., 2017). Another concern with whole-class cocreation is students in the class may still experience marginalization and feel their contributions are silenced (Bali, 2014; Ellsworth, 1989).

Often, partnership models happen on a small scale with dedicated instructors but not at scale or for larger enrollment courses or programs. Literature focused on getting started with student–instructor partnerships suggests starting small (Cook-Sather, 2014).

As Bovill (2020) stated:

Whole class co-creation in learning and teaching requires the teacher to be responsive to the needs of each new group of students . . . and to potentially adopt a career-long commitment to engage deeply with each new group of students to mutually negotiate each new learning encounter. (p. 1033)

Cocreation that supports culturally sustaining pedagogy and radical pedagogy demands power sharing, negotiation, and dialogue. It takes time to build and establish trust with students, which suggests this approach may be more conducive to smaller courses but challenging for larger enrollment courses (Bovill, 2019).

The whole-class approach to student–instructor partnerships may present a more equitable way of engaging students, as all students who enroll in the course participate in a process of cocreating some or all of the course materials, processes, and structures of the course and not just a select few (Bovill, 2019; Reitenauer et al., 2015). I present two examples of a whole-class approach to cocreation: first, where the whole class collaborates on the process of the course, and second, where students choose their own projects and connect around discussion and reflection related to class themes and objectives.

For the first example of a whole-class approach to cocreation, I share a case study by Wymer and Fulford (2019) that described transformational student voice partnership on a small scale. A few months before the launch of a class on LGBTQ literature at North Carolina Central University (NCCU), the state of North Carolina passed House Bill 2, known as HB2, a bill noted for its anti-LGBTQ rhetoric targeting transgender people's use of public restrooms. After the passing of the oppressive HB2, students in the class were eager to discuss progress around transgender rights. As the course began, students discussed readings from the course text about inclusive and exclusive language regarding LGBTQ people in textbooks in higher education. Initial class discussions led students to identify a required book in one of the program's foundational courses that students felt used derogatory language and sexist stories and examples. Students pushed for a critique

of the language and naming practices used in this text that were used to teach foundational knowledge in the program. These discussions led the instructor of the course to connect students with a member of the committee at their university (i.e., NCCU) who had selected the book. The instructor facilitated student discussion in a workshop to reflect on stereotypes they felt the book promoted. The workshop led to a discussion of how and why the committee had chosen the book and standards in language, ultimately leading to a desire for change at the publisher level. The NCCU committee member connected students with the book publisher, and the students engaged in dialogue around more inclusive language for the next edition of the book, which was in review at the time of the study. According to Wymer and Fulford (2019):

Students expressed how empowering it felt for them to be able to raise issues with people they felt to be authorities: instructors, program directors, authors, and textbook publishers. That their concerns were heard and resulted in change was something that several of them had not imagined was possible. (p. 52)

In the example from NCCU, students expressed ideas that helped to change their educational experiences, and the collaborative student–faculty partnership required the faculty member to reconfigure “her planned course schedule to make space for further discussion and action” (Wymer & Fulford, 2019, p. 53), which involved inviting other partners to workshop with her students. This case study offers an example of how flexibility, acceptance of power sharing, and valuing student perspectives can increase instructor attention to student representation and responsiveness in curriculum.

For the second example of a whole-class approach to cocreation, I sought an example of research efforts already underway from the site of this study, PSU. The Effective Change Agent Capstone at PSU was designed in response to student requests

for a course where students could build partnerships in the community of their choosing (Reitenauer et al., 2015). Students in the Effective Change Agent Capstone course cocreate learning materials as a whole class through multidisciplinary group work, which they connect to PSU's general education goals of community, critical thinking, appreciation of the diversity of the human experience, and social and ethical responsibility.

Individual course projects have resulted in establishing a computer lab and lending library for persons experiencing houselessness, starting educational and community gardens, and critical improvements to a toy room at a program that serves children undergoing chemotherapy (Reitenauer et al., 2015). The Effective Change Agent Capstone includes the course text *Walk Out Walk On* by Margaret Wheatlye and Deborah Frieze (2011), which Reitenauer et al. (2015) stated provides:

Case studies of seven communities around the world in which community members have 'walked out' of oppressive ideological perspectives rooted in structural inequities and 'walked on' to new ways of relating to the challenges within their communities in order to transform them. (p. 124)

Although some students come to the PSU capstone with the self-awareness and leadership skills to begin to collaborate, Reitenauer et al. (2015) also noted:

Many others must discover their capacities for leadership through fresh experiences offered by the class on multiple levels (i.e., within the communities from which they come, the communities in which they serve, and the learning community created within the course) and through reflection on those experiences. (p. 125)

In the Reitenauer et al. (2015) article, three students described using their own voices through their experience in the Effective Change Agent Capstone. Tetiana Korzun, a biology and Russian Language major, had recently immigrated to the United States and

had been tutoring through the PSU Russian Flagship program at a local middle school. She noticed many students who were considered Russian heritage speakers were stronger in English than in their native Russian. For her work in the Effective Change Agent Capstone, Korzun developed a dual-language program in Russian and English in partnership with a local community middle school. Korzun reflected on the importance of choosing a project that directly affected the culture of her home community. She explained the “capstone experience didn’t stop with getting a grade in the class” (Reitenauer et al., 2015, p. 128) and she saw connections for further engagement with other languages in the PSU immersion program.

Kimberly Lane, a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz and part of the Effective Change Agent Capstone, created a prevention of domestic and sexual violence program with the specific support for Two Spirit persons (Reitenauer et al., 2015).

Kimberly (as cited in Reitenauer et al., 2015) said:

This experience allowed me to initiate several agendas within my own communities and to push for expansion within organizations I was already affiliated with. In this work, I was inspired to address not one but several issues in communities where members of target identities--Indigenous, economically disadvantaged, Two-Spirit--encounter oppression, identify the source of the structural inequality, and formulate a plan to enact change and incite awareness around these issues. Taking on a task of this magnitude was scary for me, as it meant having to be self-disciplined in my time management, trust in my education and intellect, and interact with professionals as their equal. (p. 130)

Lane (as cited in Reitenauer et al., 2015) noted “it is hard to move on from this class” (p. 130), and having the support to affect positive change does not always exist in other classes and spaces.

The final student highlighted in the study, Melinda Roberts, created a campus sexual assault prevention toolkit for student advocates and campus leaders as her work in

the Effective Change Agents Capstone (Reitenauer et al., 2015). Roberts (as cited in Reitenauer et al., 2015) reflected on the process for coconstruction in this class, stating, “Ground rules are critical. If the class doesn’t have them, it’s impossible for individuals to hold each other accountable, and that makes it harder to remain interested and invested” (p. 132). Roberts (as cited in Reitenauer et al., 2015) identified structure and ground rules as needed components for success in a whole-class coconstruction approach, and continued, “As a result of working on this project, I learned about my capacity to empower myself and deepened my sense of self-determination [and] developed real connections with survivors, public officials, teachers, administrators, other student activists, and community organizations” (p. 132). As a catalyst for action and reflection, the Effective Change Agent Capstone illustrates a whole-class approach to student–instructor partnerships where students choose their own areas of research and collaborate as a collective group to reflect on their practice (Reitenauer et al., 2015).

The whole-class approach to coconstruction may include a structure such as the Effective Change Agent Capstone at PSU where major assignments are driven by student interests who engage around a series of preselected readings and discussion topics, or it may take a more collective approach where students identify a problem and seek to collaboratively research it in partnership with their instructors and community members. Whole-class coconstruction approaches have been explored in literature, with scholars suggesting they are potentially more inclusive than engaging individual students in coconstruction (Bovill, 2020; Bovill et al., 2016; Hanna-Benson et al., 2020; Moore-Cherry, 2016).



Other examples of the whole-class approach to coconstruction in the scholarly literature may include names such as participatory design, cooperative design, student–staff partnership, codesign, or cocreation (Wu et al., 2021), among others. Deeley (2013) conducted a study on the whole-class participation in coassessment (i.e., assessment of one’s own work and assessment by another person such as a peer or instructor). Four male and four female students participated in semistructured interviews about their experiences with coassessment and indicated coassessment was helpful in their learning (Deeley, 2013). In a study of students and instructors, Lubicz-Nawrocka (2018) found students in the whole-class cocreation model were able to contribute their ideas and knowledge to course examples, which aided in the adaptation of the curriculum to the student’s interests, thereby becoming more relevant to their lives. Brubaker (2012), the researcher who was the author of the paper and the instructor for the course being studied, involved students in determining course content and assessments and described how students were surprised and unsure of what to do with having new responsibilities related to their learning. Brubaker (2012) described cocreation with his class as challenging yet having strong potential outcomes, such as “active participation in democratic life” (p. 174). Brubaker also explained cocreation promoted alternative possibilities for learning. Altogether, the literature highlights how students want to be more involved in higher levels of creation in curriculum (Matthews et al., 2017).

### ***Synthesis of Empirical Scholarly Literature***

My interpretation of the scholarly literature on various approaches to student–instructor partnerships is that the whole class approach has more potential than a consultancy model for offering growth and liberation to all who engage in the process.

Specifically, the whole-class approach offers students decision-making power in the classroom without the hidden agenda of privileging students who are selected by an instructor partner. All students have an opportunity to contribute in ways they find meaningful; thus, the approach to students-as-partners work I recommended to participants in this study was a whole-class approach.

### **Review of Methodological Literature**

The conceptual framework that guided this study highlighted themes of power, democracy, positionality, and resistance as important constructs to explore in understanding representation and responsiveness to student perspectives in curriculum. In PAR, research questions and methods are determined collaboratively with coresearchers where power is negotiated and shared. According to MacDonald (2012), “PAR is considered democratic, equitable, liberating, and life-enhancing qualitative inquiry” (p. 34). PAR is a pragmatic approach for a study framed by power, democracy, resistance, and positionality.

PAR is a common research methodological approach in the field of public health. PAR public health studies use reflection, data collection, and action from coresearchers to improve health outcomes and reduce inequities (Baum et al., 2006). In PAR, coresearchers engage in a reflective cycle of collecting and analyzing data and collectively deciding actions that should follow to enact change in a community (Baum et al., 2006). In the field of education, PAR is linked to cooperative inquiry—the practice of conducting research *with* instead of *on* people. Education PAR researchers acknowledge multiple ways of knowing, including lived experience (Heron & Reason, 2006). The choice of PAR methodology for this study was an attempt to create counternarratives to

those generated by research in academia that do not equally share decision making and control over research outcomes with participants and instead are determined by the research alone (Herr & Anderson, 2015). PAR methodology creates opportunity for instructors to own the outcomes of the research, to address representation and responsiveness in curriculum, and to advocate at the institutional level for curricular change.

Extant qualitative research on student–instructor partnerships has used various methods such as case study, ethnography, interviews, and narrative analysis. Duda and Danielson (2018), for instance, included semistructured interviews of faculty participants followed by a survey and focus group. Existing research with students and instructors has used participatory methods such as PAR, youth PAR, and community-based PAR. For example, Davis and Parmenter (2020) conducted PAR research with students to coproduce knowledge and develop a research-based pedagogy to answer their research questions.

An example of a PAR study in education highlights the problem of low numbers of women who graduate with an engineering degree at a midwestern public university (Arthur & Guy, 2020). To intentionally center women’s voices and generate solutions for measurable change in the engineering community, Arthur and Guy (2020) held a series of workshops for 79 female students over the course of three semesters in an engineering cooperative learning program. Arthur and Guy identified a central problem for the study: women account for only 20% of engineering degrees, and the field of engineering is reported to leave female engineers feeling lonely, unsupported, and tokenized. Students who participated were taken through a series of seven steps (Arthur & Guy, 2020):

1. Climate setting: a getting to know everyone activity.
2. Generating: participants responded to prompts on post-its.
3. Appreciating: participants walked around the room and read other's responses.
4. Reflecting: participants spent time in quiet reflection.
5. Understanding: participants divided into small groups and analyzed a set of prompts. Groups were asked to come up with three to five themes that covered the overlapping ideas from the prompt.
6. Selection: the same smaller groups shared their themes and discussed as a group. The small groups then came back together as a larger group and condensed the themes into three to five final themes that were similar across all groups.
7. Action: participants used final themes to identify action steps to carry out and were facilitated to be concrete, measurable, and realistically achievable.

Participants identified three themes: (a) growth, which referred to women naming their experiences of growing professionally within their educational program; (b) a “chilly” educational environment, referring to unsupportive working environments for female engineers and female students; and (c) internal struggle, referring to women feeling capable and incapable at times due to confidence and a lack of confidence (Arthur & Guy, 2020). To address these themes, participants developed and recommended three action items from their research: develop a stronger community of women, build confidence in women, and create a more inclusive environment (Arthur & Guy, 2020). Participants listed several key strategies for achieving each action item recommendation.

Based on their findings, Arthur and Guy (2020) cautioned readers not to assume all women's experiences are the same and offered strong recommendations and action steps for engineering education based on this study. As they noted, “By collaborating with women and providing them an outlet and opportunity to discuss their experiences, the research is working to empower them to become more reflexive in regard to their own experiences” (Arthur & Guy, 2020, p. 220). Notably, Arthur and Guy used some language in the findings of their study that assumed a power dynamic over female

participants by positioning women as the problem (i.e., women lagging in enrollment) and as needing to be the change makers in the field of engineering and engineering education (i.e., women need to network/women need to join clubs), indicating it is the responsibility of the women impacted to go forth and create change in the field of engineering. Takeaways from this study included varying degrees of participation of women as coresearchers in a PAR study and the importance of a review session by other researchers or community members so findings do not frame students or instructors at a deficit. One way I addressed deficit framing of students in this study was with the addition of an advisory committee, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3.

Finally, it is important to note the students in Arthur and Guy's (2020) study were not coauthors of the paper and instead collaborated and participated at lower levels of participation using more PAR elements than a fully PAR methodological approach. From Arthur and Guy, I learned it may be necessary based on participant coresearcher availability to have varying degrees of participation. This research was conducted during a full year of isolation during the COVID-19 global pandemic, and participants had varying degrees of availability over the course of the study. As a result, coresearchers were invited to participate at the levels to which they were available; all phases of the research, including data collection and analysis, were open to all coresearchers. To account for an instructor–coresearcher who may not have been able to join in on meetings, all notes were captured in Google Drive, and a follow-up email reviewing what was covered was sent to all coresearchers.

Another study using participatory methods in education explored the process of creating student–instructor partnerships, with the goal of enabling students to influence

educational change. The project was built around 1st-year students' experiences in a project called Partnerships in Education (PIE) at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom (Seale et al., 2015). Faculty and student participants in the PIE project set goals for the research and shared in the decision-making process, thereby owning project outcomes (Seale et al., 2015). Researchers paid particular attention to power and emphasized nonhierarchical relationships where both the researcher and participants had equal status and power (Seale et al., 2015). Tasks in the PIE project specifically included collaborative agenda setting and collaborative decision making about the overall research design, including methods, data collection, and analysis.

The PIE project started in a department of learning and teaching at the University of Exeter, which formed a steering committee composed of curriculum educators and 2nd-year students. Sixty-five 2nd-year students were recruited to participate in the project to share about their experiences from their 1st year of college. Three students indicated interest in participating in the steering committee, and 11 students volunteered to participate in the analysis phase to interpret themes that resulted from the 1st-year student experience. The researchers' original plan for the study was to hold focus groups with the anticipated number of 65 students; however, only 11 students opted to participate, so the steering committee elected to instead run an online survey with 1st-year students. Student participants collaborated with researchers on the development of a research survey, which included 15 questions. A group of 65 1st-year students were recruited to take the online survey, of which 15 responded. Two 2nd-year students volunteered to disseminate data, analyze findings, and present on the results in the roles of coresearchers.

Students on the steering committee proposed the concept of a mood board or visual collage to increase responses from 1st-year students with the theme: “Share Your Learning Experiences of Year 1” (Seale et al., 2015, p. 540). Eleven mood boards were analyzed by coresearchers, and five themes were identified: resources, lecturers, what is taught on the program, student work and assessment, and impact. Second-year students presented their findings in a project report to administrators in their institution.

In the paper that outlined the PIE project, two students and two educator coresearchers shared their perspectives on partnership from the project, raising questions about the power dynamics between students and educators, the impact and benefit of the work or relevance to their lives and studies, and the struggle for continuous engagement (Seale et al., 2015). For example, Alice (as cited in Seale et al., 2015), a student coresearcher on the project, explained, “Instinct tells you to avoid heavy disagreement with someone who has power over you, despite staff assertions that they value your real opinions” (p. 543). Suanne, an educator on the project, had to navigate coordinating multiple timetables to accommodate student and faculty schedules, which she felt ultimately affected participant engagement (Seale et al., 2015).

One piece that resonated with me is how the researchers were surprised with lower-than-expected turnout from students in both the recruited 1st- and 2nd-year cohorts. Although students had the opportunity to have their perspectives heard and represented in changing teaching practices based on their experiences, not all who were offered the opportunity did so. A takeaway from this study was “if we continue to ignore issues of power and resistance, we will fall far short of the vision of student engagement and the ideals of strong participation and expression of student voice” (Seale et al., 2015,

p. 550). This quote from Seale et al. (2015) referenced an important point: if researchers assume a group of students who opt in to participate represent all students' perspectives, it may ultimately essentialize the student experience. It is important to note Seale et al.'s (2015) wonderings at the end of their study about whether partnership projects where students opt in genuinely engage or empower all students.

### ***Synthesis of the Methodological Literature***

An important consideration from the review of the PAR methodological literature was the potential unintended consequence of essentializing a student's experience. Arthur and Guy (2020) used participatory methods to partner with women to enact change in the field of engineering and engineering education; however, their findings used language to suggest women (and not men or others) need to be the change makers in their field. Seale et al. (2015) used PAR to suggest changes in teaching practices at a university by pairing students and educators together as decision makers; however, researchers in the PIE project had much lower levels of student participation than expected, which raised concerns about future research efforts that engage with students-as-partners—the process may only be available to students who have higher social positions of privilege to participate (Seale et al., 2015). Upon reflection on my review of the methodological literature, I identified gaps in the scholarly literature on the problem of representation and responsiveness in curriculum. First, there remains little-to-no research on cocreation in online courses, and research that centers students and instructors as coresearchers may risk essentializing student experiences.

I wanted to better understand the question, “What is the student experience with coconstruction in an online class?” While conducting my literature review, I was pleased



to come across two studies related to student–instructor partnership research published by an instructor at PSU. Vicki Reitenauer, an instructor in PSU’s University Studies Department, had employed coconstruction in her courses for years at PSU (Cates et al., 2018; Reitenauer et al., 2015), and I sent her an email inquiring if I could partner with her to conduct a pilot study in Fall 2020. She invited me to be part of her teaching team for the Fall 2020 11-week quarter. As a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic in Fall 2020, her course was taught online for the first time, which created an inopportune moment to study how coconstruction happens online. The pilot study created the conditions for me to understand and prepare to address essentializing the student experience online later in our research.

### **Fall 2020 Pilot**

The Fall 2020 pilot took place at PSU (also the site for this dissertation research) in a university studies freshman inquiry course with a theme of power and imagination. This course was unique in several different ways. Students engaged as a cohort over three quarters, or a full academic year, compared to the usual term length of one quarter. Two instructors decided to coteach their courses, effectively merging two sections together, which necessitated the creation of a teaching team including two instructors, two undergraduate mentors, two academic coaches, and me as coresearcher. Finally, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, this course was taught remotely.

Undergraduate students served on the teaching team in roles of student mentor and academic coach (official positions students apply for and are paid for by the university studies department) who collaborated with the instructors to initially design the course for enrolled undergraduate students. As a clarification these students were not paid

as a part of the pilot study; they were paid in their roles with the university as mentors.

Additionally, students who enrolled in the course engaged with the teaching team in a students-as-partners approach, where students were invited to take over the class, offered opportunities to teach and engage alongside teaching team members, decided certain elements of what and how they wanted to collaborate with each other, and practiced self-grading.

The beginning stages of the curriculum for the power and imagination course in Fall 2020 were offered to students in the form of a course syllabus with key learning objectives, course assignments and activities, and information about self-grading. The Fall 2020 syllabus outlined specifics for students in their first term together, how the teaching team and students would explore traditional instructor–student power relations, how in winter and spring the teaching team and students would collaboratively design course content and learning processes, and how collectively students wanted to engage with the content.

To explore the process of cocreation in a digital learning environment and how the process of cocreation informed student representation and responsiveness in curriculum, I started with the following research questions:

1. How do students and instructors in a remote course at a large, public, urban university describe the cocreation process of an online course?
2. What challenges/benefits do participants identify from a cocreative partnership in an online course?
3. In what ways does digital technology facilitate/strengthen or restrict/challenge student–instructor partnerships?
4. What [if any] effects do participants describe from a remote learning context course that is both synchronous and asynchronous and what [if any] outcomes do participants describe related to building and cocreating curriculum?

The instructors of record for both courses (i.e., Vicki Reitenauer and Dr. Lindsey Wilkinson), the two student mentors, two student advisors (names redacted for privacy), and I collectively became coresearchers of this PAR pilot study for a total team of seven coresearchers. My positioning in the pilot was participant–observer; I waited to be invited into student spaces before attending. In teaching team meetings, I took the role of participant, engaging in cocreating curriculum and providing feedback on student discussion posts and in student weekly journals (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The teaching team began meeting before the start of Fall 2020 term to begin building working relationships and review the suggested syllabus items from the instructors.

To answer my research questions, I took notes in the form of researcher memos to document how the process of cocreation unfolded in weekly teaching team meetings and class sessions. For methods, I proposed interviews of teaching team members, student interviews, and a student written reflection. Around Week 7 of the term, I invited teaching team members to review my initial research questions and methods. Based on availability, one instructor and one student mentor agreed to participate. No changes were made to the research questions; however, the team did revise the suggested interview questions for instructors, interview questions for students, and reflection questions for students. These new interview and reflection questions were shared with the teaching team, and a second round of small changes were made to slightly narrow language used in interview and reflection questions to make the questions slightly more relatable for students and instructors. For example, “Can you describe the cocreation process?” was changed to, “Can you describe how was it to choose your own content and make your own choices?” All changes were resubmitted and approved through the Institutional

Review Board (IRB). The teaching team elected to make the final journal prompt for the class include the reflection questions for this study in Week 10 of the term.

Data collected included 18 researcher memos, nine student reflections, three student interviews, and four teaching team member interviews. Researcher memos and student reflections were written documents, and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for coding purposes. All data were uploaded to Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software that allowed for comparison of quotes as codes and groups of codes in a code manager. All student names referenced in pilot data were pseudonyms.

Two members of the teaching team—one student mentor and one academic coach—participated in the first meeting of the collaborative analysis phase of this research. To preserve anonymity, two coding spaces were created in Atlas.ti to allow for collaborative analysis. There was one coding space to which only I had access. The other space included data where anonymity did not need to be preserved; it included 17 of the 18 researcher memos, which did not reveal any sensitive student information, and two teaching team interviews from coresearchers who gave their permission to have their interviews coded by other teaching team members.

### ***Collaborative Analysis***

The research team began analysis using an initial open coding cycle to code line by line (Charmaz, 2006), a second eclectic coding cycle to form connections across codes, a third coding cycle to identify themes from the second coding cycle, and a fourth coding cycle to map patterns and themes to the pilot's research questions (see Table 3).

Analysis began with the team of three coresearchers (i.e., me and two undergraduate students from the teaching team) in discussion about the initial open

coding process (Saldaña, 2016). Initial coding was used as a first step to reflect deeply on data in a coding cycle to identify actions that may be recurring in each line of text (Charmaz, 1996; Saldaña, 2016). Beginning the initial coding process, one coresearcher who initially expressed interest in participating had to excuse themselves due to health concerns. Thus, one other coresearcher and I did all the coding and analysis represented in four iterations of analysis, as shown in a code map (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Code Mapping for Fall 2020 Pilot: Four Iterations of Analysis (To Be Read From the Bottom Up)*

| Fourth Cycle: Application of themes, patterns to research questions   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| RQ 1:<br>How do students and instructors in a remote course at a large, public, urban university describe the cocreation process of an online course? | RQ 2:<br>What challenges/benefits do participants identify from a cocreative partnership in an online course? | RQ 3:<br>In what ways does digital technology facilitate/strengthen or restrict/challenge student–instructor partnerships? | RQ 4:<br>What [if any] effects do participants describe from a remote/synchronous/asynchronous learning context and if any outcomes related to building and cocreating? |
| Personalization (personalizing) and connection are critical   | Challenging with less structure   | Allowing for increased flexibility   | Context (remote/face-to-face) impacting student–instructor experience   |
| Importance of self-grading  | Structure needed (balancing between how much structure to offer)  | At times allowing for more personalization/safety, at times creating less safety/less personalization                      | Personalizing asynchronous context (one-on-one and smaller group settings)  |
| Empowering  | Seeking/choosing agency   | Fatigue (energy loss)  |   |

Prohibiting  
participation due to  
technology linked  
with financial  
security

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Final Coding Cycle: Themes

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Self-grading that  
is structured and  
allows for high  
levels of agency  
and choice is an  
important  
component to  
coconstruction in  
digital learning  
environments.

Participants relying  
on the power of one-  
on-one and personal  
connections to resist  
deficit student  
expectations.

Cocreation in Online/Digital  
Environments needing different  
approaches from those employed  
in face-to-face classrooms

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Second Coding Cycle Eclectic Coding: Patterns

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Self-grading  
as critical to  
coconstruction

Strained/challenge  
d in choosing  
agency without  
structure

Personalizing and  
connection are  
critical

Challenges with remote learning  
format

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Initial First Coding Cycle

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Wrestling  
with choice  
Self-  
determination  
self-grading  
Systems of  
oppression  
Positionality-  
theory of  
student voice

Unsure of  
trust/power  
Planning/claiming  
Disrupting hidden  
curriculum

Relationship  
Building- CSP  
Personalizing  
socializing/norming  
Connection  
One-to-one  
connection

Technology impact technology/  
remote  
Critique  
Process  
Example

---

Data: researcher memos, student interviews, instructor interviews, student reflections

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*Note.* Adapted from “Qualitative Analysis on Stage: Making the Research Process More Public” by V. A. Anfara, Jr., K. M. Brown, and T. L. Mangione, *Educational Researcher*, 31(7), p. 32. Copyright 2002 by American Educational Research Association.

Transitioning from initial coding, we employed eclectic coding, a process recommended for beginning qualitative researchers (Saldaña, 2016) in which researchers look at codes and make comparisons between categories (Anfara et al., 2002). Through discussion, we collaboratively identified patterns around process type codes or “-ing” codes (Anfara et al., 2002; Saldaña, 2016). Process or action coding is used to help in identifying broader concepts (Saldaña, 2016). We identified three overarching themes based on second round patterns through a collaborative discussion and reflection on codes from both first and second cycles (see Table 3). Additionally, as eclectic coding should purposefully serve the needs of the study, a fourth iteration of coding was conducted to map action patterns and themes to the research questions of the pilot study (see Table 3; Saldaña, 2016).

For the final stage of analysis, I built a quote matrix with the research questions in the left-hand column and quotes that pertained to each question in the second column. I reflected on the quotes and began naming themes I saw represented. I compared these themes with those from the collaborative analysis for similarities and differences; similar themes allowed for increased flexibility and personalization and remote formats created a feeling of not feeling safe and lacking personalization. There was one theme I identified from the quote matrix that was not noted in the collaborative analysis: individuals who hold social positions of power may tend to benefit more immediately or readily from curricula designed to be liberatory. I journaled on the idea that students who are historically underinvested in by society may initially struggle when presented with opportunities to exercise agency and turned to examples in the data for additional clarification. For example, Jordan, a student who benefits from social positioning in

terms of race and gender (i.e., white male) noted, “When you have the power, you just want to give yourself an A, even if you don't deserve one, because that's what you want.” He described his willingness in claiming his grade (deservedly or not) when offered the opportunity to do so.

In contrast, Aiyden, a person of color and male, said, “I almost felt as if I needed a little more structure for how I learn as it's hard for me to make choices.” Sofia, a white woman, stated, “So it was kind of difficult for me to give feedback on what I want to learn since I wasn't sure myself and I am used to not having a choice.” This finding informed the design of my dissertation study—namely, how much support to provide students when conducting coconstruction online was an important consideration for instructors during the curriculum development phase of the study.

Students and instructors in the pilot study described the cocreation process as beneficial when the process was personalized. Personalization was described as flexibility, having the ability to choose, and contributing to curriculum based on personal interests and areas of study. Students and instructors also noted the importance of flexibility, structure, and self-grading. Specifically, findings suggested cocreative partnerships can be challenging in an online environment and may require personalization to be built into the curriculum in the form of reflection, feedback, and time for one-on-one connections. Challenges with the format of remote learning included lack of privacy, lack of safety, and lack of access to technology (linked to financial security), resulting in lower levels of participation than hoped for. In this context, there was a heightened need to build community due to the option for students to have their web cameras turned off during meetings. When challenged with the format of remote



learning, teaching team members relied on one-on-one connections with students and having students collaborate in smaller, more personal groups, creating opportunities for more intimate conversations.

Additionally, findings from the pilot suggested cocreation can increase engagement and participation; however, high levels of structure or structured course frameworks related to curriculum and grading are needed in online environments. Both students and instructors commented on the need for structure as a bridge from curriculum with little-to-no agency to curriculum that is coconstructed; moreover, they stated a lack of structure in online environments was challenging for the process of coconstruction. Opportunities related to coconstruction online to include structure and self-grading learned in the pilot were shared with instructors in the dissertation study to help support their research.

Structure can take many forms in the curriculum. Structure in the context of online learning will most likely need to be created prior to the start of the term, which leaves the initial approach of coconstruction in curriculum up to the instructor teaching the course. Of note from the methodological literature review is students may not readily embrace opportunities to participate (Ellsworth, 1989; Seale et al., 2015) in coconstruction (along with self-grading). Students may need instructors to provide structure and guidance for how to participate, how to make choices to self-direct their learning, and how to make meaningful contributions to the curriculum.

Findings from the pilot suggested the need for structured support for students in coconstruction, opportunities for students to personalize their learning experience (such as choosing the topic they want to study), and chances to share the importance of self-

grading. Instructors should build structure and support for students to offer equitable participation in coconstruction for all students. The review of the methodological literature affirmed the use of PAR for this study as an approach that would empower participants to enact curricular change. Instructors were the appropriate coresearchers for this study because instructor perceptions and experiences informed understanding of the processes and challenges at play so the research team can collectively plan paths toward more radical coconstruction of curriculum.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

Curriculum and course materials often center a white, male point of view, thereby creating educational experiences that are not inclusive of all students. Lack of inclusivity can negatively affect the student experience (Begum & Saini, 2019; Bernal, 2002; Harwood et al., 2018; Lykes et al., 2018). Although scholarship indicates student–instructor coconstruction of course syllabi and course materials and activities is promising for increasing representation and responsiveness, there remains very little research on what this process might look like in the context of online education for undergraduate students situated in an urban campus environment. To address representation and responsiveness in curriculum in the context of online learning, I conducted a study framed in terms of student voice, radical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy using PAR to empower instructors to enact change in curriculum design. The use of PAR positioned instructor experiences as counternarratives to traditional curriculum design in academia. Using PAR as a methodology and reflective process was a move away from a linear top-down process where instructors assign

curriculum to students, and instead moved toward new understandings of collaborative and coconstructed curricula.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

In this study, I investigated, along with instructor coresearchers, the lack of representation of and responsiveness to student perspectives in curricula for asynchronous online undergraduate courses. Existing scholarship has suggested cocreation can increase representation and responsiveness to student perspectives in face-to-face courses (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, 2018; Fielding, 2001; Matthews et al., 2019; Reitenauer et al., 2015). Yet, little research has addressed cocreation in the context of asynchronous online learning. The purpose of this study was to explore processes of student–instructor cocreation in pursuit of student voice work in the asynchronous online class environment to construct a student–instructor cocreation partnership framework for asynchronous online courses. Additionally, due to the variety of definitions for student voice work in the scholarly literature and the lack of scholarship related to student voice in online learning, I developed the following definition of student voice for use in this study: student voice work is a shared decision-making process between students and instructors that harnesses the power of student’s lived experiences and voices to create democratic classrooms; this work involves choice and agency for students and aims to be transformative for both students and instructors.

In this chapter, I review the reasoning for a qualitative and participatory action research (PAR) approach to this research. I share my philosophical positioning related to this research and provide an overview of the structure and participation of the project team and advisory committee. This chapter includes detailed tables that outline the phases of the research and work plan for the research team and advisory committee, including the review of methods, collection of data, and how the project team approached

analyzing data and taking collective action. I also address the role of the project team as coresearchers and address validity and reliability.

### **Research Methods**

Qualitative research is an approach to research using emerging questions and procedures to explore and understand a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative inquiry is often flexible, and the researcher is positioned as the instrument, or the one to make meaning of the data. In contrast, in quantitative research, researchers engage in highly structured inquiry to examine the relationship among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Types of qualitative methods used to understand and improve one's own practice include case study, ethnography, interviews, phenomenology, and narrative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study was an exploration of each participating instructor's teaching practice, a form of applied research to understand one's experience in a particular discipline and a collective interdisciplinary approach to curriculum that necessitates a qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### ***Rationale for PAR***

One possible methodological approach to this study was narrative inquiry. Specifically, narrative research is a type of inquiry where narratives are organized into a storied flow, combining views from both the participant's life and the researcher's life (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although a narrative inquiry methodology had the potential to amplify student and instructor voices, it would not have offered instructor participants an opportunity for agency in the research, nor does narrative inquiry seek change and contribute to educational transformation as part of the research process. In a narrative

inquiry approach, the underlying outcome of the methodology does not call for participants to act or seek change. As the underlying goal of this research was to call for action and change, I was led to choose a liberatory methodology and practice, that of PAR.

PAR in the field of education aims to bring students and instructors “to the table as more equal partners in school improvement and reform processes” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 28). In this PAR study, the instructors and the researcher (myself) were positioned as coresearchers who collaborated to take action. We collaborated to address mutually agreed upon problems and concerns through the design and implementation for our research study. Community sharing and discussion were important to the process of our PAR study and added deeper levels of analysis and insight into the problem of representation and responsiveness in curriculum than would have been possible without such collaboration.

### ***Qualitative Research Paradigm***

When designing and engaging in inquiry, Guba (1990) recommended researchers consider questions about their ontological, epistemological, and methodological or axiological orientations. Ontological questions address the nature of reality, epistemological questions address the relationship between the inquirer and the known, and axiological questions address the goals or aims of scholarly inquiry (Guba, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1994). When taken together, responses reveal a person’s belief system or paradigm guiding scholarly inquiry (Guba, 1990).

Guba and Lincoln (2005) proposed five paradigms for guiding scholarly inquiry: positivism, post positivism, critical theory, constructivism, and participatory. A paradigm

guiding scholarly inquiry is a set of assumptions about the nature of reality, how humans can come to know about reality, and the aims of research. These assumptions guide decisions about methodological approach and specific methods for data collection, generation, and analysis. Guba and Lincoln contrasted the positivist/postpositivist paradigms where values are excluded, training is technical, and ethics are extrinsic with the critical theory, constructivism, and participatory paradigms, where values are included and formative, training is about empowerment, and ethics are intrinsic (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

The critical theory paradigm centers action in the form of empowerment with a goal of social transformation, equity, and social justice, which fit the goal of this study. Although philosophical similarities suggest critical theoretical perspectives methods and perspectives are applicable and relatable to inquiry into researching power struggles and power sharing, research into coconstruction and seeking educational change in representation and responsiveness in curriculum suggests, or even necessitates, a link to participatory approaches to research. The participatory paradigm is rooted in action, coresearching, inquiry in a community of practice, and the idea of seeking change (Heron & Reason, 1997). Although the goals of the critical theory paradigm aligned with the purpose of this study, only the participatory paradigm calls for participants to come together as coresearchers in reflective practice, calling on democracy in the inquiry process to lead to action (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Heron & Reason, 1997). In the context of research on representation and responsiveness to student voices, a participatory approach to data collection and analysis prompts instructors to not only create

collaborative solutions that are driven by the needs of the community, but also to seek curricular changes at the institutional level.

The participatory paradigm is based on assumptions that reality is participatory, and coconstructed, knowledge is a living (i.e., continuously created), cocreated process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Those who engage in the participatory paradigm value experiential, presentational, and practical knowledge; think knowledge is created in communities of practice (with others); and believe the creation of new knowledge leads to action in service of transforming societies for better quality of life (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Specifically, researchers working within the participatory paradigm involve coresearchers in the creation of the research design, including development of questions, methods, and analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Heron and Reason (1997) argued, “Qualitative research *about* people is a halfway house between exclusive, controlling, quantitative, positivist research on people and fully participatory, cooperative research *with* people” (p. 285). The more participants are involved in the research, the higher potential for change (Heron & Reason, 1997). Qualitative research is inquiry about people in their settings and contexts, but the participatory approach to inquiry is about an aspect of the human condition a group of coresearchers choose to study based on their own experiences, reflecting a revision of previously held definitions of researcher and participant roles (Guishard, 2009; Heron & Reason, 1997; Rivera et al., 2019).

For this study, I positioned myself in the participatory paradigm, which acknowledged knowledge as a cocreated process embedded in communities of inquiry. From this perspective, the creation of knowledge is in service to taking action to



transform the world (Heron & Reason, 1997). I shared a story from my educational journey in Chapter 1 to situate the context of myself and my beliefs in this research; the value systems I have inherited; and how my lived experiences have shaped how I view my relationship with the research, coresearchers, and participants. My hope for this dialectical approach was to deepen and expand—not simply confirm—my own understanding of the contextualized problem of a lack of representation and responsiveness to student perspectives in curriculum (Maxwell, 2013).

### ***Positionality in Action Research***

My current job in the Office of Academic Innovation is senior user experience designer. User experience (UX) design is a set of skills inherited from the field of website and software design and requires attention to how people navigate digital spaces related to digital and graphic design. In my role, I rely heavily on my experience as a digital artist and designer in my interpretation of learning tasks and materials. Specifically, I bring direct attention to the student experience in how a student navigates the web and how the integration of technology can affect a student's learning. My experiences with art, accessibility, usability, language (from my bachelor's degree in Spanish), and design are somewhat unique in the field of curriculum design and influence how I collaborate with instructors in my position as senior UX designer.

In my role in this PAR study, I was positioned as an outsider conducting research with instructor insiders, whereas instructor researchers engaged in a study of their own practices as part of a collective with other instructor researchers. My positioning as an outsider was important in that I could advise on curriculum in the study but did not hold sole decision-making power over curriculum in any course. Instructor coresearchers were

the only ones who could ultimately decide to create changes in the curriculum for their classes. The unequal power dynamic in the project team was important to identify because literature has documented the goals of action research may be compromised by instructors who value publication of their own research over the goals and timelines of the PAR study (Herr & Anderson, 2015) or over the goals I needed to complete my dissertation. To meet the goals and timelines of this dissertation research, I formed an advisory committee of stakeholders to advise the research team and built several requirements to keep us on track, as discussed later in this chapter.

### ***Coconspiring***

Love (2019) described the work of seriously critiquing one's own sociocultural heritage related to race, ethnicity, family structure, sexuality, class, abilities, and religion in connection with sexuality, white supremacy, and whiteness as necessary and needed steps to begin work that attempts to change educational spaces in collaboration with BIPOC. This work is coconspiring—understanding where we, as researchers, are in systems of privilege and oppression, building relationships of solidarity and mutuality, and grounding collaboration in humility and accountability (Love, 2019).

As a person who holds incredible and immense privilege and power in my cis, white, hetero, able-bodied, middle-class identity, with generations of support to encourage and guide me in my doctoral work (e.g., my great-great-grandmother had her college degree), I acknowledge my positions of privilege may have at times created biases in this research. One way I attempted to counteract my biases was to conduct research as a coconspirator. I committed to reflecting on how I benefit from systems of privilege and oppression to best support students and instructors of color in this research

and focused on building relationships in the framework of equity, equality, and mutual respect.

### Research Phases

I review each phase of the research to give a sense of the commitment instructors signed up for during recruitment and then I discuss the parameters of recruitment and selection to the study. This research had three chronological phases: the first phase was dedicated to PAR procedures and course development as a project team and took place over one quarter or 12 weeks. The second phase was the course implementation and data collection phase, where instructor coresearchers taught their courses and collected data from each other over two quarters depending on teaching schedule and availability and immediately following the first phase. The final phase was the collaborative analysis and action phase, where the project team collaborated to analyze data and decide on collective action from our findings. All phases included both research and action components (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Phases of PAR Research*

| Phase  | Quarter                  | Meeting schedule   |
|--|--------------------------|--|
| Phase 1: PAR procedures and course development           | Spring 2021              | Meetings 1–6 with project team<br>Meetings 2, 4, 6 with advisory committee |
| Phase 2: Course implementation and data collection phase | Summer 2021<br>Fall 2021 | Met monthly for summer<br>Met twice a month for fall                       |
| Phase 3: Collaborative analysis and action phase         | Winter 2022              | 3 synchronous meetings; data validation and confirmation                   |

This study engaged participants over four quarters. In Spring 2021, participants engaged as coresearchers with me and the advisory committee in PAR to design their online courses for either the Summer 2021 or Fall 2021. Coresearchers for this study included instructors who taught an asynchronous undergraduate online course in Summer 2021 or Fall 2021 at PSU. Criteria for the selection of instructors for the study included the following: the instructor must have been slated to teach online for Summer 2021 or Fall 2021, they must have been available and willing to collaborate as a coresearcher as part of the PAR conducted from Spring 2021 through Fall 2021, and they must have been willing or had secured departmental approval to conduct a students-as-partners framework for their online course in Summer 2021 or Fall 2021. Recruitment information for instructor participants called for BIPOC and nonmale instructors to intentionally center their experiences. Instructor status—such as graduate assistant, adjunct, instructor, or tenure track—did not exclude any person from participating. Any disciplines and class sizes were considered, although smaller class sizes (< 50 students) were preferred. Preference for smaller class size was based on the scholarly findings that cocreation may be easier to begin with a class with a smaller number of enrolled students (Bovill et al., 2016).

I opened this study to six instructor participants. Due to the highly collaborative nature of this project, it was important we kept participant numbers small. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended one to two participants in narrative qualitative studies, three to 10 for studies in phenomenology, or four to five for case study methods. A sample size of one or two participants would have limited a full understanding of challenges experienced by participants and could potentially have affected the outcome

of a students-as-partners framework for undergraduate online learning, in that findings might have been limited to the experiences of one instructor. A sample size of six participants allowed for connections and patterns among the group.

To bring any interested instructors who teach online to engage in a new approach to online learning and teaching, I sent out a recruitment email introducing the project (see Appendix A) and a follow-up consent form and survey to all instructors of online courses at PSU slated for late Winter 2021 quarter (see Appendix B). Thirty-two instructors completed the survey, and more emailed and expressed interest in the study. To narrow the participant pool to the desired six participants, I emailed instructors with instructions to self-select out of the study if they did not meet the study's goals of centering BIPOC and nonmale instructors. Many instructors expressed interest in participating but opted out based on the criteria. Two instructors self-identified as women of color and were automatically extended an invite. Two instructors reached out directly to express interest, share availability, and offer their support, along with specific interest based on intersectional experiences related to sexual orientation or disability. Both were extended invites. Finally, the two remaining instructors were chosen based on discipline, as I was interested in having instructors representing different teaching backgrounds and subjects.

### **Participants: Project Team and Advisory Committee**

Coresearching, cocreating, coconstruction; adding a “co” to our actions implied collaboration and participation, or a collective “we.” As a group, we committed to this research, to work through the difficult moments, and to move forward even when life made it feel challenging. We each brought different lived experiences to the question of “why we are here today” (when the world was still navigating a pandemic) and engaged

in research that challenged us and asked us to step outside our areas of comfort and power. I am honored to share this space with these five incredible women who gave me their trust and determination to stay with me throughout the journey. We are a group who have historically experienced exclusion in academia (although it is important to note the varying degrees of inclusion and exclusion as white women, such as myself, have for decades been centered at the expense of other intersectional communities).

Although six instructors were invited to engage in this work, one instructor recused themselves after their position was changed from faculty to administrative leadership after our second meeting. Five instructors committed to coresearching and participated in data collection and analysis. Three instructors held adjunct status, one was a clinical assistant professor, and one held a tenure-track position.

In the following section, each researcher shares in their own words a reflection on several of the themes from this research and their experiences engaged in this research.

Drs. Joy Mutare, Teresa Roberts, Kim Brown, Jennifer Young, and Patricia Atkinson were instructor coresearchers, and Margarita Turney was the graduate research assistant.

***Dr. Joy Mutare***

Dr. Joy was an author and adjunct professor of sociology at PSU. Born and raised in Zimbabwe, she migrated to the United States in 1997 and teaches on subjects related to gender and sexuality. Dr. Joy preferred to go by Dr. Joy, using her first name, which is how she is referenced throughout this study. I introduce Dr. Joy with a few paragraphs from her interview for this study.

*I do recognize that I am on the fence of heavy privilege where I have power in certain aspects, but also recognize that I'm also seen as another. So even my own ways of*

*trying to create, to participate in coconstruction. But also having that dichotomy of having power in my heterosexuality in my, in my cis identity, able-bodied-ness, you know, I recognize that I have that dichotomy of privilege and oppression, that kind of thing. The students themselves, as mostly white students that I'm teaching, still kind of have somewhat of a position of power from a sociological standpoint.*

*Speaking from my own perspective, as an immigrant, as one who's always considered as other, right, I really am usually sensitive to the idea of anything that is named culturally specific, or culturally sustaining, or anything that has to do with culture. Because while I understand that these are ideas that promote equity, and, you know, across identities, and ensure access to opportunities, sometimes I find them to be overused. And sometimes I find them to be used as a kind of like catch phrases and, I just, even when my own self is me teaching courses on my own culture, I must be conscious of the fact that I have gotten a western view on education and western view of thinking. So, I really must question myself first, in the ways that I'm engaging with these terms, and how then I am deploying them.*

*And I don't know if we can ever really shed all of the power or the oppression that we feel even if we're doing participatory action research. It sounds nice, and it sounds, it is a great idea. And I think it's being done, if it's being done well. But I also still want us to remain cautious of the fact that we still hold these positions in society. But I also would like for us to remain cautious of the fact that we shouldn't get taken for granted that we're doing this work without questioning how well we're doing it. Or how much we're even reproducing. The same isms that we're trying to, we're trying to work against right, we are saying, we are doing this work. But I just want to caution on remaining conscious of*

*the power that we still have in the privilege that we still have, even if you say we're doing this work, that unconsciously we might still be reproducing those systems.*

***Dr. Teresa Roberts***

Teresa was a clinical assistant professor in speech and hearing sciences at PSU. Teresa specializes in speech and language development and disorders, professional issues, interprofessional collaboration, special education law, and multiculturalism. In 2022, Teresa held the position of Faculty in Residence for Inclusion at the Office of Academic Innovation. Teresa preferred to go by Teresa, which is how she is referenced throughout this study. I introduce Teresa with a few paragraphs from one of her researcher memos for this study.

*I am new to participatory action research. And I have colleagues who are involved in thoughtful research that starts with the needs of particular minoritized communities. So, I feel like there's still a lot for me to learn about research design. I did recognize that the collaborative process can bring about different and unexpected directions, which I think is beneficial. I also appreciated the way it meant that lots of people could bring experiences, wisdom, and share and contribute. And that there were attempts to have reduced status and have a sort of shared levels of contribution.*

*I don't want to discount my involvement in the research, but I want to say that when I'm thinking about my classes, I'm almost exclusively thinking about my students. And how it gets reported to a research team is secondary in my thought process. So, when I was engaged in this, I thought, how can I take the pieces that are part of this research, and then switch my focus immediately to hear some pieces? Now my focus is my students.*



*Our childhood educational experiences may affect how we approach new teaching practices. The first time I was asked to use self-grading was when I was a student in a middle school art class. I was neither confident nor skilled with art projects. I completed my project and gave myself the equivalent of a B+ grade, primarily based on my belief that any given product could always be improved, and my belief that I had more to learn. A boy in the class, who was popular, athletic, and well-liked, asked me about how I'd graded myself. I told him my score and then he said he gave himself an A+, 100%. I looked at his project and then at mine and knew that mine was better. He thought this situation was funny and laughed at what he considered to be my foolishness about not giving myself an A.*

*As an instructor using self-grading, I immediately wondered about the cultural, social, emotional and psychological implications of rating one's own effort and performance. Cultural norms of self-promotion, rating and ranking, achievement and individual pride are not universal. I reflected on self-grading as a concept in professional life, including writing clinical reports, Individualized Education Plans, requests for proposals, and other forms of written discourse that had pre-determined guidelines. As a professional speech language pathologist, I often examine my own work to evaluate how it meets certain professional standards and criteria. I sought to explain the purpose of self-grading from a professional perspective to students and help them feel empowered to see self-grading as a tool for future clinical roles.*

***Dr. Jennifer Young***

Jennifer was an adjunct instructor in the School of Public Health at PSU. Jennifer specializes in community health and nutrition and teaches courses on food security.

Jennifer preferred to go by Jennifer, which is how she is referenced throughout this study.

I introduce Jennifer with a few paragraphs from one of her researcher memos for this study.

*I have spent my career working in public health nutrition at the local and state level and teaching as adjunct faculty. Working in two different positions has allowed me to fulfill two great passions: working to strengthen public health nutrition policies and practices, and teaching what I have learned. Working with students compliments my full-time work in public health, shedding light into the gap between theory and practice. Hearing students' stories reflected through their assignments and discussions provides insight into how others perceive and exist within the structures of society that I would not have understood otherwise. I often feel that a student's question or comment is like a puzzle piece, filling a space in my own understanding that I hadn't even known was there.*

*Participating as a member of this participatory action research team is like another found puzzle piece. I have been teaching an asynchronous community nutrition course for the past several years. I find it difficult in any online class to motivate students to actively share their voice, and a-synchronicity adds another level of anonymity. During COVID it has been especially difficult as more students seem to disappear for weeks at a time—not turning in work or joining in discussion— only to learn from them later about struggles with anxiety, depression, isolation or losing family members. I jumped at the chance to work with a team of PSU educators conducting PAR on coconstructing curriculum with students. My interest in PAR and my experience in the classroom made me believe that I would truly enjoy this work and possibly learn something about improving student engagement and learning. I knew very little about the*

*topic [of coconstruction], and I do not necessarily think that the changes I made to drive coconstruction (self-grading; choice of assignments; cocreation of exam questions) did much to make students feel that they had agency in coconstructing their learning.*

*However, the research process has provided me with renewed respect for student voice, insight on self-grading and providing choice, and allowed me to use what I learned to make additional changes in the following term.*

***Dr. Kim Brown***

Kim was an assistant professor in applied linguistics at PSU. She specializes in international development education, intercultural competence assessment, and food commodity chains. Kim is fluent in English, French, and Farsi, and teaches courses on applied linguistics, teaching English to speakers of other languages, curriculum design, and food security. Kim preferred to go by Kim, which is how she is referenced throughout this study. I introduce Kim with a few paragraphs from her interview for this study.

*I believe that it is possible to create community in an online learning setting. I mean, I really believe that it's possible. And when I get pushback from colleagues, you know, I'm even more comfortable saying this is an evidence-based claim. And to be really honest, I felt so safe taking risks with the people who were in this group. And I can say part of it was because of Kari. Part of it is because of who each of the individuals are. But I also think that it was a safer space for me, even as a senior faculty member, being among female colleagues. Being able to collaborate with the group of individuals as we all are and seeing the richness and the thoughtfulness and the care that everyone has put into, volunteering comments about who we are and what that means, and what that*

*means in our classes was really powerful. And I think, again, that there is an element of safety that can be gained from collaborating.*

*The other thing is that I felt like when people had conversations about children in this group, it was okay to have that conversation. I recently had two conversations with colleagues about what's shifted over Portland State's time toward women, having children and taking leaves, and being supported, and having tenure, clock set and reset. Things are different now than they were even 10 years ago. And I think that we're making progress. But one of the things to be gained from collaborating with female faculty, is also getting people's insights on how they survived as women in the academy. And I am not sure that would be public information, if it were a mixed group.*

*But I will also say, just that it's tough. I feel that, you know, what we've been doing in all of this research, is really kind of ripping ourselves open, for me what's a good way, but it's still very vulnerable, like a very vulnerable way to try something new, see how it works, and talk about what that was. But I think that without a feeling of safety, I would have struggled, being this vulnerable. You know, I felt like things could go wrong with what I was trying to do [in] summer. And it was still okay, because I had a safe space to process what was going wrong. I will say though that my level of anxiety regarding "doing it wrong" has been both debilitating and facilitative.*

***Dr. Patricia Atkinson***

Patricia was a tenured professor of economics at Clark College and an adjunct instructor at PSU. She specializes in economics and teaches courses on macroeconomics. Patricia preferred to go by Patricia, which is how she is referenced throughout this study.

I introduce Patricia with a few paragraphs from one of her researcher memos for this study.

*As a first-generation baccalaureate student, I felt alone in my education process in higher ed. I did not feel that I belonged. I suffered from identity threat as a woman in higher ed in a predominantly male field. In addition, I felt like an imposter. In suffering from imposter syndrome, I experienced feeling like a phony who did not belong at the college and in my classes. As a student I was fearful of questions and speaking out about topics. I just did not have the confidence that I “knew enough.”*

*I connect my personal feelings/experiences to this work in certain ways. I have a unique contribution to this work because I recognize how I felt as a student, vulnerable and uncertain, in the attitudes and perceptions of some of my students. While recording grades at the end of the term, too many times according to the syllabus, the numbers indicated that a student failed, when I felt the student presented enough demonstration of the course outcomes to pass the class or earn a higher grade.*

*My experience as a professor for nearly 2 decades and as a recent graduate student in education and social justice issues also informs my research. I recognize the transformative power of education as we as educators provide a variety of opportunities for students to demonstrate the course outcomes. Coconstructing the curriculum and listening to students’ voices we realize their voices matter, their knowledge matters. Students enter the (virtual) classroom with funds of knowledge and assets from cultural and familial resources that equip them to succeed in higher education. Their resourcefulness, hopefulness, strategic thinking, self-reliance among other attributes set*

*them up for success, overcoming identity threat and imposter syndrome among marginalized groups of students.*

*An essential component of this model entails trust. Trust, something I'd like to highlight, flows both ways. Not only do we need to trust our students, but we also need to trust ourselves in this process as educators. Through this study, I recognized in my fellow colleagues that we developed and learned to trust ourselves as the individuals who coconstructed knowledge with our students in a rich, deep process. In this rich, deep process the joy springs from the students' excitement and passion for knowledge. For example, many students commented at the end of the term in their course evaluations that they expected the course would be very boring and they only signed up for the class because their degree required them to complete the course. However, at the end of the term, they acknowledged that they experienced joy in learning the course outcomes. By meeting the students where they were and recognizing their assets and cultural capital, cocreating and coconstructing knowledge, created a joy and passion for learning in the students. And for myself, I don't have another word for it, except joy.*

### ***Margarita***

Margarita played an important role in the analysis of this research. I met with Margarita throughout the Fall 2021 quarter and January 2022. Margarita began with reviewing the student and instructor transcripts for errors that may have occurred during the process of audio transcribing text from each video interview. She fixed errors, paragraphs, and adjusted any words that were misread by the transcription service (such as misspelling *adjunct* as *ad junct*). Next, Margarita and I began initial coding of student and instructor interviews and researcher memos. After we had presented initial codes to

the instructor researchers, we began working on a codebook for each code that was used two or more times in the coding process. Throughout the initial coding process, I asked Margarita to challenge and question codes I had written. We met several times to work through questions she posed and merge similar codes. Initial coding was a valuable process derived from the words of the participants and built the foundation to our research. I am incredibly grateful for Margarita's valuable contributions to this research. Margarita preferred to go by Margarita, which is how she is referenced throughout this study. Next, Margarita shares a little about herself and contributions to analysis.

*In elementary school, I struggled to learn. I was embarrassed and sometimes bullied for being behind my peers. At school, I felt too distracted to engage. I was always daydreaming. I didn't feel connected to my peers, my teacher, and definitely not to spelling or math, but I was also aware of being behind. When we went, as a class, to the library, I remember being the only student returning to the picture book section while my peers went to the young adult chapter books. It didn't escape my teacher's notice that I was failing my classes, that I couldn't spell and barely read in the third grade. After testing my IQ, my parents and my teacher decided it would be best to leave to me my own devices and that eventually I would catch up. I have mixed feelings about this decision, because it felt like I was being ignored. In fifth grade I began taking control of my own learning. I would sit down for 20 minutes a day to read. In the end, I was the only one who could make a difference in my education and sitting down to read for 20 minutes a day when I was 10 became the foundation for self-teaching and my curiosity about learning.*

*I have a unique contribution to this work because I believe that I can understand the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of the students who are trying to conceptualize what it means to be a partner in their learning. My experiences with taking control of my learning at the age of 10 and continually throughout my life inform this research by bringing in the perspective of a student who believes strongly in the learning process. It takes both passion for learning and a compassion for oneself when failing to learn.*

### ***Advisory Committee***

Consistent with various forms of PAR (such as community-based PAR and youth PAR), I solicited participation and guidance from an advisory committee (Maiter et al., 2012). I sought advisory committee participation from an instructional designer; two students; one academic staff member who serves PSU in a position related to assessment; and one academic staff member in a position related to equity and inclusion (see Appendix C). Advisory members received an invitation to participate by email (see Appendix C) and confirmed their consent to participate (see Appendix D) by replying to the original email.

The advisory committee served to support and guide coresearchers in connection with the field of online learning and student success at PSU. Specifically, the role of the advisory committee was to “provide an infrastructure for community members to voice concerns and priorities that otherwise might not enter into the researchers’ agenda, and advise about suitable research processes that are respectful of and acceptable to the community” (Newman et al., 2011, p. 1). I discuss specifics of the role of the advisory committee in connection with the project team in more detail in the procedures section of this chapter.



## Procedures

Instructors who engaged as coresearchers in PAR as part of this study reviewed and edited research questions, established data collection methods, designed and implemented curricular changes to one of their courses, and conducted data analysis over the course of four quarters at PSU (i.e., a full academic year). As this research process was detailed, I provide a table that outlines the meeting structure, which had two overarching goals around PAR procedures (data collection, generation, and analysis) and action procedures around course development (professional development, course design, course implementation; see Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Research Outline, Goals, Data Collection, and Analysis by Meeting*

| Quarter   | Spring 2021: PAR Procedures & Course Development  |
|---|---|
| Meeting   | 1   |
| Outcome<br>Key Question<br>(PAR<br>procedures)      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project team engaged in PAR processes including a review of the design matrix (see Table 6).</li> <li>• What is known about representation and responsiveness within the curriculum?</li> </ul>  |
| Research<br>Activities                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions: What brought you to this research?</li> <li>• Discussed community agreements.</li> <li>• Discussion about PAR.</li> <li>• Discussion on the problem of representation and responsiveness</li> <li>• Reviewed conceptual framework that guided this study (see Appendix K).</li> <li>• Reviewed research design matrix (see Table 6).</li> </ul> |
| Outcome,<br>Key Question<br>(Course<br>Development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructors gathered ideas for implementing partnerships.</li> <li>• How did you teach this class?</li> </ul>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Research Activities (Course Development)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussed curriculum (old/ new).</li> <li>● Reviewed Fielding's (2001) evaluating the conditions for student voice (see Table 1) mapping activity (see Appendix L).</li> </ul>  |
| Data Collection method                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memo 1 prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you envision elements from the conceptual framework being involved in the design of your course?</li> <li>○ What questions do you have moving forward?</li> <li>○ What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| Plan for Analysis                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reflected about analysis: Coding throughout the analysis process or in additional meetings in Winter 2021. Recommend coding throughout the research study. Decision was put back to a later meeting.</li> </ul>   |
| Meeting                                     | 2  |
| Outcomes, Key Questions (PAR Procedures)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The project team engaged in memoing and PAR processes.</li> <li>● Project team and advisory committee collaborated and held discussions relevant to the study.</li> <li>● How do we plan to analyze and code our data?</li> <li>● What changes can be made to the research design?</li> </ul>   |
| Research Activities (PAR Procedures)        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Welcomed advisory committee.</li> <li>● Reviewed community agreements.</li> <li>● Collaborated to revise the research design matrix including how we wanted to analyze data (either with extra meetings or as data were collected).</li> </ul>  |
| Outcome, Key Questions (Course Development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mapped course assignments to Fielding's conditions for evaluating student voice (see Appendix L)</li> <li>● What did the mapping activity reveal to you about student voice and your teaching practice?</li> <li>● What will you implement as a result?</li> <li>● What changes do you see necessary to cultivate power/sharing and coconstruction with students for your class?</li> </ul> |
| Research Activities (Course Development)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussed curriculum (old/new)</li> <li>● Reviewed Fielding's Table mapping activity</li> </ul>   |
| Data Collection method                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memo 2 prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What changes do you see necessary to cultivate power/sharing and coconstruction with students for</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |

- your class?
- Reflect on conversations with the advisory committee. How might you benefit from working with the advisory committee?
- What questions do you have moving forward?
- What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?

| Analysis                                    | Initial Coding   |
|---|--|
| Meeting                                     | 3  |
| Outcome                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The project team engaged in memoing and PAR processes.</li> </ul>   |
| Research Activity (PAR Procedures)          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussion on how challenged each other to move from co-option and compliance to collective action.</li> </ul>  |
| Outcome, Key Questions (Course Development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instructors described strategies to counter white/male/hetero hegemony.</li> <li>● How do we interrupt the process of white/male centering in this process?</li> <li>● What changes are you making as a result?</li> <li>● How will students interact with you, the instructors and with each other online?</li> </ul>  |
| Research Activities (Course Development)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presentation and discussion facilitation on self-grading with advisory member with experience in assessment.</li> <li>● Built fall curricula.</li> <li>● Discuss/reflect situations where white/male/hetero centering happens in their class.</li> <li>● Discussion of relevant research as needed in response to activity/presentation including students-as-partners examples or online learning pedagogy.</li> </ul>   |
| Data Collection method                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memo 3 prompt:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reflections from Meeting 3.</li> <li>○ What thoughts do you have attempting self-grading for your class?</li> <li>○ What challenges might you have in sharing power in your class?</li> <li>○ Describe how power sharing is being negotiated on the project team.</li> <li>○ What questions do you have moving forward?</li> <li>○ What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Analysis                                    | Initial Coding   |
| Meeting                                     | 4  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Outcomes<br>(PAR<br>Procedures)                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project team engaged in memoing and PAR processes.</li> <li>• The project team engaged with their advisory committee.</li> </ul>  |
| Research<br>Activities<br>(PAR<br>Procedures)        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion in collaboration with the advisory committee on interview assignment and plans for coconstruction.</li> </ul>  |
| Outcome,<br>Key Questions<br>(Course<br>Development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructors engaged with different types of knowledge making with family/community members.</li> <li>• How do you currently incorporate elements of cultural wealth in your curriculum?</li> <li>• When speaking how do you expect your students to listen?</li> <li>• When you are listening, what do you expect from those who are speaking?</li> </ul> |
| Research<br>Activities<br>(Course<br>Development)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity: Interview (see Appendix N)</li> <li>• Built fall curricula.</li> </ul>  |
| Data Collection<br>method                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memo 4 prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reflect on Meeting 4 with the advisory committee.</li> <li>○ What questions do you have moving forward?</li> <li>○ What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| Analysis   | Initial Coding   |
| Meeting  | 5  |
| Outcome<br>(PAR<br>Procedures)                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project team engaged in memoing and PAR processes.</li> </ul>   |
| Research<br>Activity<br>(PAR<br>Procedures)          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion on any changes to research design/analysis.</li> </ul>   |
| Outcome,<br>Key Questions<br>(Course<br>Development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applied family interview reflections to fall curriculum.</li> <li>• What emerged for you from the interview activity?</li> <li>• What will you implement as a result?</li> </ul>  |
| Research<br>Activities<br>(Course<br>Development)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of interview activity.</li> <li>• Curriculum development discussion on progress/needs/questions.</li> </ul>  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Data Collection method                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memo 5 prompt:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reflect on Meeting 5.</li> <li>○ What questions do you have moving forward?</li> <li>○ What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| Analysis                                 | Initial Coding  |
| Meeting                                  | 6   |
| Outcomes, Key Questions (PAR Procedures) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project team met with the advisory committee.</li> <li>● Project team engaged in coconstruction of research questions, methods, and data analysis.</li> <li>● How would you change the suggested research questions?</li> <li>● What data collection methods will we as a group decide to engage with to support our research questions?</li> <li>● Determined needed changes to IRB forms.</li> </ul>   |
| Research Activities (PAR Procedures)     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instructors reviewed and shared their plans for summer/fall coconstructed curriculum and got feedback from team members and the advisory committee.</li> <li>● Discussion on how we wanted to conduct student and instructor interviews as a team.</li> <li>● Discussion on how we wanted to stay in touch over summer &amp; fall as a team. Instructors requested monthly meetings.</li> <li>● Reviewed research study design for any recommended changes.</li> </ul> |
| Outcome, (Course Development)            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instructors had a coconstructed curricular framework for summer or fall that they shared with the advisory committee for feedback.</li> </ul>  |
| Research Activity (Course Development)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instructors reviewed and shared their plans for summer/fall coconstructed curriculum and got feedback from team members and the advisory committee.</li> </ul>   |
| Data Collection method                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memo 6 prompt:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reflect on discussions the project team has had with the advisory committee including questions and recommendations they've posed to the team.</li> <li>○ What questions do you have moving forward?</li> <li>○ What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| Analysis                                 | Initial Coding  |
| Meeting                                  | 7: Course Implementation and Data Collection Phase Summer and Fall 2021   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Outcomes<br>(PAR<br>Procedures)                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kari held monthly meetings in summer and meetings every two weeks in the fall.</li> <li>● Kari posted the informed consent documents to each course to inform students about the opportunity to participate and opt-in to interviews (see Appendix E).</li> <li>● Scheduled student interviews (see Appendix G).</li> <li>● Student interviews conducted in summer/fall term (see Appendix J).</li> <li>● Instructor interviews scheduled (see Appendix I).</li> </ul>             |
| Research<br>Activities<br>(PAR<br>Procedures)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instructors reflected on how curricular changes are going.</li> <li>● Project team independently completed researcher Memo 7.</li> </ul>   |
| Outcome<br>(Course<br>Development)              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instructors taught their online course.</li> </ul>   |
| Research<br>Activity<br>(Course<br>Development) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support offered to instructors around curriculum design.</li> </ul>  |
| Data Collection<br>method                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher Memo 7 reflected on guiding questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have you witnessed elements of liberation, engagement, or transformation from students in your class? Please describe.</li> <li>○ Have you witnessed any challenges or barriers that have emerged? Please describe.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Instructor interviews conducted, audio recorded (see Appendix I).</li> <li>● Student interviews, audio recorded (see Appendix J).</li> </ul> |
| Analysis  | Initial Coding  |
| Meeting   | 8: Collaborative Analysis and Action Phase  |
| Outcomes,<br>(PAR<br>Procedures)                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project team discussed summer/fall experiences and collaboratively analyzed data to determine findings.</li> <li>● The project team decided on collective action [ongoing].</li> </ul>   |
| Research<br>Activities<br>(PAR<br>Procedures)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Research team collaboratively analyzed data.</li> <li>● Reviewed codes and themes.</li> <li>● Collaboratively determined themes and findings.</li> <li>● Discussed new questions as a result of PAR procedures and data collection.</li> <li>● Adapted research questions.</li> <li>● Determined next steps toward action and future meetings.</li> </ul>  |

|   |  |
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| Outcome,<br>(Course<br>Development)             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is critical from this research in understanding and implementing a coconstructive pedagogy within online learning?</li> </ul>  |
| Research<br>Activity<br>(Course<br>Development) | none   |
| Data Collection<br>method                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher Memo 8:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What emerged for you as a result of this research?</li> <li>○ What surprised you?</li> <li>○ What do you need to know more about?</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Member checking</li> </ul> |
| Analysis  | Initial Coding, Second iteration of Focused/Process Coding, Final themes   |

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The project team met twice a month as a group and monthly with both the project team and advisory committee throughout the Spring 2021 quarter. The first meeting with the project team began at the exact hour Derek Chauvin was convicted of murdering George Floyd. Instructors came as they were, and we collectively acknowledged needing to hold space for processing in this pivotal moment in time. After a 20-minute discussion, the group indicated they wanted to begin. We began with introductions, community agreements, and a discussion about PAR. After these steps, we reviewed the research design matrix and set a plan to edit research questions, finalize methods, and review coding and analysis steps in Meeting 2. Then we ended with discussion of what is known about representation and responsiveness in curriculum guided by Fielding's (2001) *Evaluating the Conditions for Student Voice* (see Table 1).

As this study centered self-reflection on one's teaching practice, it was important to explore what each instructor already knew about teaching based on their daily teaching

experiences or academic pursuits. Each instructor contributed information, such as how tasks and routines were different from one another yet were also informative (Herr & Anderson, 2015). We engaged in a discussion of curriculum related to what was known about the problem and held space for questions from the group. Meeting 1 concluded with a discussion of previous experiences with various partnership models, including suggestions from the literature, an activity using the research action spiral to understand and engage with the conceptual framework (see Appendix K), and a memo about how elements from the conceptual framework related to the design of each coresearcher's course (see Appendix H).

In Meeting 2, the project team welcomed the advisory committee members, collaborated to edit the research design matrix, and decided how to analyze data. In Meeting 3, we reviewed the mapping activity with Fielding's (2001) table from Meeting 1 (see Appendix L), concluded with a discussion about curriculum and power sharing, and left time for memoing about questions related to the process of coconstruction as an asynchronous activity. Meeting 4 began with a discussion about how we might challenge each other to move from co-option of student voice work toward collective action. Next, the project team heard from an advisory team member about self-grading and held a discussion on curriculum changes, along with any research deemed relevant to researcher questions. Meeting 4 ended with a quick discussion about IRB and a memo related to self-grading.

In Meeting 5, the project team and advisory committee reviewed the interview activity, where researchers interviewed two family/community members about their favorite and least favorite educational experiences to engage in an activity that honored



various types of knowledge-making and listening. The interview activity served to emphasize the importance of familial oral history and community cultural wealth. The activity was a practice in listening, an important practice in this work. The activity also was an exercise for instructors to direct their attention to potential power dynamics in the conversation and reflect on how they were affected (Burbach, 2018). After a discussion about power and listening from the interview activity, we discussed the build out of the curriculum for Summer and Fall 2021 and completed a memo about questions researchers had in moving forward.

In Meeting 6, the last of spring quarter, instructors shared their plans for summer and fall coconstructed curriculum with the advisory committee for feedback. Next, the group revisited the study's research questions, made changes, and confirmed plans for data collection and protocols for student interviews. Finally, the project team discussed how to stay in contact with each other throughout the summer and fall terms.

During the Summer 2021 and Fall 2021 terms, I reached out to meet with each project team member to review progress, answer questions, ask that each person complete researcher Memo 7 (see Appendix H), and schedule their interview time (see Appendix I). Although this study was participatory, I took several steps to maintain the original goals of this research. First, I put boundaries on my coresearchers' influence and decision-making power so: (a) the purpose of the study remained unchanged, (b) changes to the research questions did not redirect the project team away from the goal of creating a students-as-partners framework for asynchronous online undergraduate courses, (c) our collaborative methods remained qualitative and included interviews, and (d) approaches elected by coresearchers did not explicitly harm nor attempt to colonize students

(Burbach, 2018; Herr & Anderson, 2015). I addressed the fourth boundary to ensure no harm would come to students through a discussion with the project team on my conceptual framework, which used themes of power, positionality, democracy, and agency.

The advisory committee was represented by students and staff at PSU and served to advise the research team on issues related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. I put boundaries on certain aspects of my dissertation to maintain the original goals of this research, keep the workload reasonable, and stick to my dissertation timeline. I acknowledge the project team and advisory committee may wish to publish on our research outside of the dissertation and may explore phenomena beyond these boundaries. The creation of an advisory committee and the specific boundaries I set allowed me to best support the project team while also completing a highly collaborative dissertation and to push for action as a result of our findings (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

### ***Research Action Spiral***

The project team engaged in a spiral of action cycles of differing durations from minutes to weeks (Herr & Anderson, 2015). According to Herr and Anderson (2015), “Sometimes, these action cycles are completed in a matter of minutes since professionals are always planning and rethinking plans on the fly. Other times, action cycles take days, weeks, or months” (p. 5). The research action spiral includes an iterative series of four steps:

- 1) develop a *plan* of action to improve what is already happening; 2) *act* to implement the plan; 3) *observe* the effects of action in the context in which it occurs and; 4) *reflect* on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and on, through a succession of cycles. (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 5)

Specifically, the research action spiral was used to organize our discussions of the research design and conceptual framework to honor elements of PAR and move us toward our collective goal of making changes in higher education.

### ***Course Design Process***

To begin the course design process, instructors were asked to share their course syllabus with me in advance of our initial team meeting. Although there are many theoretical and practical approaches to instructional design, there are several expected practices one would expect to encounter when designing curriculum: discussion between academic staff (which, for the purpose of this study, is me) and the instructor about course goals, alignment of assessment activities to course outcomes, organizational strategies, engagement with new pedagogical approaches, technological support, and identification of learning tasks (Estes et al., 2020; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). In Meetings 1–5, we held discussions about course structure and goals to identify opportunities for coconstruction. Instructor coresearchers approached coconstruction in a variety of ways; for example, several instructors built in opportunities for self-grading, whereas one planned for curriculum to be built with students after the course started. All collaborations with instructors and advisory committee members took place over Zoom due to the restrictions in place as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Based on a combination of my professional experience in the field of online course development with instructors and feedback from students and teaching team members in my pilot study, I made the choice to engage instructors and not students in a somewhat constrained experience of coconstructing curriculum. This experience was constrained in that, ideally students would be engaged throughout the curriculum creation

and delivery process and in coconstruction at the programmatic or institutional level. I worked with faculty to create the conditions for cocreation to study how power, positionality, and democracy in the classroom affected representation and responsiveness. Because I worked with faculty new to coconstruction and because of time constraints on this study, I chose to engage faculty in planning for coconstruction of some course components without insisting every facet of the courses be coconstructed.

### **Data Collection**

Data collected throughout this study included researcher memos, student interviews, and instructor interviews. The team collectively reviewed the research questions throughout our meetings to ground our understanding of the work moving forward throughout the year. Researcher memos (see Appendix H) were written by all coresearchers as a form of reflection, a critical aspect of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015). These researcher memos per researcher were coded; the memos helped to inform understanding of the process pieces of this research.

Instructor interviews were 30–60 minutes in length and conducted by members of the project team. A list of suggested questions for the instructor interviews based on research questions were reviewed and updated by the research team and approved by the IRB (see Appendix I). Students in each class were invited to participate in a 30-minute interview for this study (see Appendix E). Students opted in to participate in an interview by consenting to the research process. Project team members conducted interviews of students only for courses of which they were not the instructor of record to preserve student anonymity. The project team created a list of questions for the student interviews based on the study's research questions (see Appendix J). Based on schedule and

availability, project team members signed up to conduct the student interviews; all five instructor coresearchers conducted student interviews.

## **Analysis**

Memoing was an important part of the data collection process and analysis. To document the collective process, all researchers wrote researcher memos throughout the research process (see Table 7). Researcher journaling or memoing is an important process needed to document ongoing thinking, decision making, and action being taken (Herr & Anderson, 2015). We began analysis with initial coding of researcher memos, student interviews, and instructor interviews. The goal of initial coding line by line (i.e., open coding) is to reflect deeply on the contents of the data and remain open to all possibilities and directions suggested by one's interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016).

In Round 2 of coding, the research team employed focused coding to establish categories from initial codes using process or “ing” codes to signal action (Saldaña, 2016). Specific to using process codes is the formation of codes into gerunds to document time and change, which may or may not happen in sequence (such as surviving, adapting, negotiating, reading; Saldaña, 2016). Focused coding was done collaboratively with other coresearchers during analysis to categorize and analyze data more precisely. By applying process codes, we identified approaches to coconstruction and challenges experienced by multiple instructors in the study. I describe focused coding in more detail in Chapter 4. There were three phases to this research I mapped to the type of data collected and specific analysis approach during each phase (see Table 6).

**Table 6***Coding and Collaborative Analysis by Research Phase*

| Phase  | Data source   | Analysis  |
|--|---|---|
| Phase 1: PAR procedures and course development     | Researcher Memos 1–6<br>(see Appendix H)  |   |
| Phase 2: Course implementation and data collection | Researcher Memo 7<br>Instructor interviews<br>(see Appendix I)<br>Student interviews (see Appendix J) | Initial coding completed and reviewed   |
| Phase 3: Collaborative analysis and action         | Researcher Memos 1–8<br>Instructor interviews<br>Student interviews                                   | Round 2 focused coding in a card sort<br><br>Code mapping via categorical and connecting strategies |

Researchers conducted interviews with each other and students in Phase 2.

Interview transcripts were audio transcribed using a software called Otter.ai immediately after the completion of each interview (see Table 6). Transcriptions from these interviews were uploaded to Atlas.ti for first and second coding cycles.

### **Research Design**

The research design matrix (see Table 7) outlines the connections between the study's data sources with the research team's analysis including validity threats and how we planned and executed on dealing with possible validity threats.

**Table 7**

*Research Design Matrix for a Study of Representation and Responsiveness to Student Perspectives in Curriculum*

| Research question   | What instructor perceptions, values, and challenges are present when transitioning to a coconstructed partnership model of learning that values culturally sustaining pedagogy?   |
|---|---|
| Specific data source  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher Memos 1–8 (see Appendix H).</li> <li>● Instructor interviews (see Appendix I).</li> </ul>   |
| Specific analysis   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memos 1–8 started with initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Instructor interviews started with initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Initial codes from interviews and memos went through a second focused/eclectic process coding cycle and were grouped into categories during collaborative analysis Meeting 8.</li> <li>● Third round of analysis consisted of categorical and connecting strategies</li> </ul>   |
| Specific validity threats                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher bias.</li> <li>● Instructor coresearchers may feel compelled to find solutions even if there are none.</li> </ul>   |
| Strategies for dealing with these specific validity threats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Multiple data sources.</li> <li>● Interviews confirmed and checked (member checking).</li> <li>● Related analysis of data back to themes of power, positionality, and democracy in conceptual framework.</li> <li>● Project team consisted of multiple researchers to check each other's work and review feedback from an advisory committee composed of stakeholders.</li> <li>● Discussion on action research validity criteria in analysis phase (see Appendix M).</li> </ul> |
| Research Question   | How does the process of engaging in PAR inform instructor perspectives on the distribution of power between students and instructors within a coconstructed curriculum?   |
| Specific data source  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher Memos 1–8 (see Appendix H).</li> <li>● Instructor interviews (see Appendix I).</li> </ul>   |
| Specific analysis   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memos 1–8 started initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Instructor interviews started with initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Second focused coding using process codes cycle and were grouped into categories and themes during collaborative analysis in Winter 2022</li> <li>● Third round of analysis consisted of categorical and connecting strategies</li> </ul>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Specific validity threats                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher bias.</li> </ul>   |
| Strategies for dealing with these specific validity threats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Multiple data sources.</li> <li>● Interviews confirmed and checked (member checking).</li> <li>● Related analysis of data back to themes of power, positionality, and democracy in conceptual framework.</li> <li>● Project team consisted of multiple researchers to check each other's work/findings including feedback from an advisory committee.</li> <li>● Discussion on action research validity criteria in analysis phase (see Appendix M).</li> </ul> |

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|-------------------|--|
| Research Question | How do instructors describe the process and challenges of developing an asynchronous course to include components of culturally sustaining pedagogy, student coconstruction, and self-grading? |
|-------------------|--|

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|   |  |
|---|--|
| Specific data source  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher memos from Meetings 1–8 (see Appendix H).</li> <li>● Instructor interviews (see Appendix I).</li> </ul>  |
| Specific analysis   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memos 1–8 started with initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Instructor interviews started with initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Second focused coding using process codes cycle and were grouped into categories and themes during collaborative analysis in Winter 2022</li> <li>● Third round of analysis consisted of categorical and connecting strategies</li> </ul>   |
| Specific validity threats                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher bias.</li> <li>● Researcher influencing data.</li> <li>● Instructor coresearchers may feel compelled to find solutions even if there are none.</li> </ul>  |
| Strategies for Dealing with these Specific Validity Threats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Multiple data sources.</li> <li>● Interviews confirmed and checked (member checking).</li> <li>● Related analysis of data back to themes of power, positionality, and democracy in conceptual framework.</li> <li>● Project team consisted of multiple researchers to check each other's work/findings and review feedback from an advisory committee composed of stakeholders.</li> <li>● Discussion on action research validity criteria in analysis phase (see Appendix M).</li> </ul> |

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|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Research Question | How does the process of student–instructor course coconstruction unfold for students and instructors in an |
|-------------------|--|

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|   | asynchronous learning environment?   |
|---|--|
| Specific data source  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher memos from Meetings 1–8 (see Appendix H).</li> <li>● Instructor interviews (see Appendix I).</li> <li>● Student interviews (see Appendix J).</li> </ul>  |
| Specific analysis   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Memos 1–8 started with initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Instructor interviews started with initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Student interviews started with initial coding processes.</li> <li>● Second focused coding using process codes cycle and were grouped into categories and themes during collaborative analysis in Winter 2022</li> <li>● Third round of analysis consisted of categorical and connecting strategies</li> </ul>  |
| Specific validity<br>Threats                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher bias.</li> <li>● Researcher influencing data.</li> <li>● Researcher coaches student towards themes they are interested in interview.</li> <li>● Instructor coresearchers may feel compelled to find solutions even if there are none.</li> </ul>   |
| Strategies for dealing<br>with these specific<br>validity threats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Multiple data sources.</li> <li>● Interviews confirmed and checked (member checking).</li> <li>● Student interviews were not conducted by the instructor who taught the course and anonymity was preserved.</li> <li>● Advisory committee consulted on course proposals.</li> <li>● Related analysis of data back to themes of power, positionality, and democracy in conceptual framework.</li> <li>● Project team consisted of multiple researchers to check each other's work/findings.</li> </ul> |

### **Validity and Reliability: Role of the Researchers**

It is important to acknowledge the goals of action research blur the roles of expert, participant, and researcher for those invested in collaboratively constructing knowledge and collaborators will vary in terms of positions of power (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Participants in this study differed in status granted by the institution (e.g., tenure status), skill level and comfort with digital tools needed to teach in an online environment, and time available to dedicate to this research. Efforts to support validity

may look and present differently in a PAR dissertation than in other forms of qualitative research due to collaborative nature of inquiry and analysis (Herr & Anderson, 2015). I referred to Herr and Anderson's (2015) goals of action research and validity criteria to inform the validity and reliability of this PAR dissertation. Herr and Anderson (2015) described five validity criteria to address goals of action research: outcome validity, process validity, catalytic validity, democratic validity, and dialogic validity.

Outcome validity was affirmed by achieving the goals of action research and evaluated by the extent to which a resolution to the problem of the study is achieved. Rigorous action research may require coresearchers to reframe the problem of which one valid outcome generates new questions (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Outcome validity was affirmed by achieving the goals of conducting a PAR study, which included six coresearchers and a graduate student research assistant. Additional outcome validity criteria met included meeting our goals of conducting qualitative research that built toward a framework, contributed to the scholarly literature, and informed understandings of online curriculum design.

An evaluation of process validity examines to what extent the "problems are framed and solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 68). Outcome and process validity rely on each other in that if the process is problematic, the outcome will reflect the process problems (Herr & Anderson, 2015). For example, a study with strong process validity will include a process of reflection that includes reexamining underlying assumptions in defining and redefining the problem. Similar to triangulation, process validation includes multiple perspectives—in the case of this study, student and instructor interviews and memos (Herr & Anderson,

2015). Process validity was addressed by framing challenges from this research as opportunities for further exploration, which indicated an ongoing pursuit of equity in curricula design and in institutions of higher education. Specific examples of process validity included an ongoing process of reflection and analysis including reexamining underlying assumptions and biases in addressing the problem of representation in online curricula. Reflection in this study was an active process that happened in discussion as a group in our regular meetings and included discussion on knowledge and experience each instructor brought to this process and discussions about power and process in curricular development within higher education.

Democratic validity is achieved when research is executed in collaboration with project stakeholders (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Specifically, democratic validity is needed in consideration of equity and social justice as problems being studied in the research are relevant to and affect the people conducting the research. Democratic validity was achieved through the PAR methodological process of collaborating with coresearchers to cocreate the research design including editing and refining research questions, editing student and instructor interview questions, and validating and confirming progress before moving forward in research and analysis processes.

Catalytic validity refers to the extent to which the researchers and their practices are transformed through participation in the research (Herr & Anderson, 2015). A critical component of catalytic validity is that coresearchers “must be open to reorienting their view of reality as well as their view of their role” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 69). Herr and Anderson (2015) also noted:

All involved in the research should deepen their understanding of the social reality under study and should be moved to some action to change it (or to reaffirm their support of it). The most powerful action research studies are those in which researchers recount a spiraling change in their own and their participants' understanding. (p. 69)

Catalytic validity was validated through the collaborative PAR analysis process and in employing member checking throughout analysis. An example of catalytic validity confirmation was how coresearchers participated in researcher memos throughout Phases 1 and 2 of this research, where upon reflection, all instructors noted transformational changes to their thoughts and actions on this work.

Evidence of dialogic validity arises when methods, evidence, and findings resonate with a community of practice (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Engaging in participatory research was a strategy for supporting dialogic validity. Dialogic validity was achieved through collective discussion and agreement on a research design throughout analysis of the data and in confirming and validating findings.

In this chapter, I addressed the rationale for this study; discussed the research design, including various levels of collaboration and analysis; outlined my role as a coresearcher; and described strategies for addressing potential validity threats. In Chapter 4, I present findings of our analyses organized around the four research questions.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter reports the findings from participatory analysis of instructor interviews, student interviews, and researcher memos. The research team employed a three-step coding analysis process, including initial coding and focused coding in the first two phases, and connecting strategies to formulate themes for the third phase of analysis. For each research question, I offer an overview of findings and explanation of the specific analytical processes and intermediary findings that led us to answer the research questions as we did. Findings for each research question contributed to analysis related to subsequent research questions. I intentionally provide a highly transparent and descriptive analysis process by sharing each step of analysis and provide a sense of how participatory analysis worked with six coresearchers and a graduate research assistant. To protect their anonymity, all student names are pseudonyms.

### **RQ1: What Instructor Perceptions, Values, and Challenges are Present When Transitioning to a Coconstructed Partnership Model of Learning That Values Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy?**

The research team generated three core findings in response to the first research question. First, in transitioning to a coconstructed partnership model of learning, instructors perceived making changes to the course in terms of sharing power and providing choices for students was risky, and they expressed anxiety about doing it wrong. Second, instructors made changes to their curriculum through shared storytelling and valued connecting as a group. Third, instructors felt challenged by the asynchronous environment and worried about the time commitment required, including how to keep up with the new forms of support for students that were needed, and knowing how and when to intervene. In the following sections, I chronicle the process by which the team

generated these three findings and then elaborate on the findings with illustrations from the data.

### **First Round of Analysis**

To begin to understand categories and themes in the data, the research team began a three-step qualitative coding process, starting with initial coding (Saldaña, 2016). I coordinated a practice coding exercise with all coresearchers and discussed how initial coding would begin. After this discussion, Margarita and I used Atlas.ti and created initial codes from the participants' words (Saldaña, 2016) for a total of 432 codes across student interviews, instructor interviews, and researcher memos. We wanted to build a shared understanding of the meaning of each code as used in the data, so Margarita and I built a codebook (see Appendix O). The codebook listed all codes used two or more times and included a definition of each code, an example from the data, and a counter example. The research team used the codebook to review codes and share common understandings to refine initial codes and to distribute codes into categories. This strategy strengthened the consistency of our coding and, subsequently, the trustworthiness of our findings. The codebook was also useful later in analysis in moving from categories to themes.

I presented the first-round codes and analytical memos developed by members of the research team to the entire team. Coresearchers then added, refined, and challenged codes over five weeks from November through December 2021. Our aim, based on participatory action research (PAR) methods, was to synthesize the coding and memoing of each instructor–coresearcher into an understanding of the collective's experiences in the process of transitioning to a coconstructed partnership model for course design.

### **Second Round of Analysis**

To move from the individual to the collective perspective, we used a card sort activity to sort codes into categories during the second round of analysis. To begin the card sort, I created digital Post-It notes of all 432 first-round codes. Instructors on the research team sorted the 432 Post-It notes into 22 categories. Figure 1 is a screen capture of the card sort activity. Although illegible, I provide an image of the card sort activity to offer the reader a picture of the sorting and categorization process.





The 22 initial categories were:

- Anxiety
- Choice . . . ?
- Risk-taking
- Engagement
- Self-grading
- Power
- Reflection
- Knowledge development
- Changing the course . . . ?
- Flexibility
- Accessible
- Identity
- Power
- Community building
- Perception of student–instructor relationship
- Connection
- Agency
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Trusting
- Student-focused
- Time

In addition to the 22 categories listed, the team identified connections across categories in the card sort activity. One example is how “self-grading and deeper reflection” connects “self-grading” and “reflection.” Another example is the code “trusting oneself” is placed in the category for “agency” and linked to the category for “trusting.” The connecting lines drawn by coresearchers indicated a need for not only a categorical analysis of the codes, but also an additional analysis consisting of connecting strategies.

### **Third Round of Analysis**

I began round 3 of analysis with a review of the research questions to help me determine how to proceed (Maxwell, 2013). Based on time, I completed round 3 of

analysis on my own, periodically sharing progress to the research team and asking for feedback. I started by adding a connecting analysis process to the categorical analysis, a necessary step for building theory (Maxwell, 2013). To gain a better understanding of instructor and student experiences in the 22 categories, I engaged in several transitional exercises to move closer to themes in the data. First, I engaged our graduate research assistant Margarita in a discussion, asking, “What do you notice about how instructors have categorized our initial codes?” Margarita pointed out power was named twice, in two different places, and wondered if they should be recategorized as one category or if they were separate. We reviewed codes under each category named “power” and identified that one category named power as personal and the other described power as an action, resulting in two categories renamed as “personal power” and “power as action.”

Next, I engaged in an exercise to define each of the 22 categories. In this part of analysis, several changes were made: “self-grading” became “self-grading as empowering,” “engagement” became “engaging in coursework,” “identity” became “expressing identity,” and “agency” had two associated codes of trust that were moved to more relevant categories, thereby eliminating the category. “Communication” was split into several subcategories to include: “feedback,” “need for more communication,” and “student-focused.” “Connection” was separated to include “instructor connection” and “students making connections,” and a new category of “discussion” was named. In the process of defining categories, I moved codes to correspond with the category they best represented, creating two new categories named “perception of instructor” and “student–instructor relationship.” The following list includes the updated 27 categories:

- Anxiety
- Personal power
- Accessible
- Community building
- Time
- Choice
- Changing the course
- Perception of instructor
- Connection
  - Instructors connecting
  - Students making connections
- Communication
  - Feedback
  - Student-focused
  - Need for more communication
- Risk-taking
- Reflection
- Expressing identity
- Trusting
- Engaging in coursework
- Knowledge development
- Student–instructor relationship
- Collaboration
- Self-grading as empowering
- Flexibility
- Power as action
- Discussion

### **Differentiating Between Instructor and Student Experiences**

To see how each of the 27 categories were represented in the data for various participants, I built a categorical data analysis matrix (see Appendix O). I began with adding two quotes for students and two quotes for instructor for each category and quickly noted how some categories included more than two quotes for either students or instructor.

As I began to fill all the categories, an area of focus became clear: there was a distinction between the instructor and student experience in the categories (see Table 8). Although it might initially seem obvious that the student and instructor experiences are

different, the data displayed this contrast in interesting ways. A few categories were uniquely important to either the student or the instructor experience, and some categories were pertinent for both groups. For example, quotes illustrated the categories of “engaging in coursework,” “self-grading as empowering,” “expressing identity” and “knowledge development,” “flexibility,” “perception of the instructor,” “student–instructor relationship,” “accessible,” “discussion,” and “communication: feedback.” These categories were more focused on the student experience than the instructor experience. Conversely, “anxiety,” “choice,” “risk-taking,” “reflection,” “expressing identity,” “power as action,” “community building,” “connection,” “communication: student-focused,” “time,” and “trusting” were about both the student and instructor experience. Quotes on categories for “personal power,” “changing the course,” and “collaboration,” were focused only on the instructor experience. Table 8 outlines categories by student and/or instructor experience.

**Table 8**

*Categories Differentiated by Student and Instructor Experience*

| Code                | Student experience | Instructor experience |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Accessible          | x                  |                       |
| Anxiety             | x                  | x                     |
| Changing the course |                    | x                     |
| Choice              | x                  | x                     |
| Collaboration       |                    | x                     |
| Communication       | x                  | x                     |

---

|                                 |   |   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Community building              | x | x |
| Discussion                      | x |   |
| Engaging in coursework          | x |   |
| Expressing identity             | x | x |
| Feedback                        | x |   |
| Flexibility                     | x |   |
| Knowledge development           | x |   |
| Need for more communication     | x |   |
| Perception of instructor        | x |   |
| Personal power                  |   | x |
| Power as action                 |   | x |
| Reflection                      | x | x |
| Risk-taking                     | x | x |
| Self-grading as empowering      | x |   |
| Student–instructor relationship | x | x |
| Student-focused                 |   | x |
| Students making connections     | x |   |
| Instructor connection           |   | x |
| Time commitment                 |   | x |
| Time management                 | x |   |
| Trusting                        | x | x |

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The process of distinguishing between student-focused and instructor-focused categories helped us answer the first research question, which centered instructor perceptions, values, and challenges in transitioning to a coconstructed partnership model of learning that values culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP).

To move toward strong connections and relationships among the categories to create themes, I pulled all 27 categories into a list. I referenced two connecting strategies, codeweaving and narrative writing, to create associations in the categories (Saldaña, 2016). Codeweaving is when an individual uses keywords from their research (in this case, I used categories established by the research team) to build a narrative to see how the puzzle pieces fit together (Saldaña, 2016). The next step in narrative analysis is to merge writings into the smallest number of sentences possible that communicate a process or describe a broader theme and search for evidence in the data that support these themes. Themes based on the instructor experience were “risk-taking” and “connecting with peers.” The theme from the instructor and student experience was “connecting,” and themes from the student experience were “developing knowledge” and “choosing.” All themes that included a subcategory were reviewed for confirmation of connection to the main category. Table 9 outlines the themes, categories, and samples from the narrative writing analysis.

**Table 9**

*Themes Related to the Instructor and Student Experiences in Coconstructing Asynchronous Curriculum*

|   |
|---|
| Instructor Experience<br>Theme: <b>Risk-taking</b>  |
| Categories related to this theme: anxiety and time commitment   |
| The time commitment for this work was a risk for instructors. Instructors described anxiety as worry or concern about engaging in coconstruction; instructors felt they were taking risks to design coconstruction in their courses related to student feedback and a lack of support in doing it wrong and in the enormity of the changes needed to make a curriculum coconstructed. |

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Instructor Experience  
**Connecting** with peers

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Categories related to this theme: expressing identity, power (power as action/interaction), changing the course, collaboration

Instructors described a deep sense of appreciation in being able to collaborate and connect with their peers from different disciplines. The ability to connect with other instructors gave instructors the opportunity to express their fears, share stories about themselves and their courses, and created the conditions needed to make changes to their courses.

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Student and Instructor Experience  
 Students and Instructors **Connecting**

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Categories related to this theme: student–instructor relationship, perception of instructor, trust, communication, feedback, need for more communication, student focused

To engage in coconstruction students wanted high levels of communication from their instructors specifically naming clear expectations and feedback as needed and necessary parts of coconstruction. Students sought connections with their instructors centering trust in the process.

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Student Experience  
 Theme: **Developing Knowledge**

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Categories related to this theme: flexibility, time, accessible, identity, reflection, discussion, community building

To develop (enhance learning) knowledge, students needed flexibility within their learning. Students described having different levels of confidence with technology and learning new systems that affected how they learn including being new to coconstruction and online learning. Students were able to learn more when they had spaces to share about themselves, reflect on their learning, and listen and learn from others.

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Student Experience  
 Theme: **Choosing**

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Categories related to this theme: personal power, students making connections, engaging in coursework, self-grading as empowering, taking risks

Students described having choices as empowering and that it aided in their learning. Choosing was also a risk as the choices that were available to students were dependent on several conditions including power dynamics in the classroom, previous experiences in developing knowledge, and how they built community in class.

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### *Perceptions, Values, and Challenges*

I returned to our first research question, which addressed instructor perceptions, values, and challenges involved in transitioning to a coconstruction model. I reorganized the categories previously subsumed under the instructor experience themes of risk taking and connecting (see Table 9) into categories relevant to instructor perceptions, values, and challenges. I present this reorganization as Table 10.

**Table 10**

#### *Instructor Perceptions, Values, and Challenges in Transitioning to Coconstructed Curriculum*

| Instructor categories | Findings  |
|-----------------------|---|
| Perceptions           | Risk-taking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Time commitment</li> </ul>  |
| Values                | Connecting<br>Trust<br>Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-focused</li> </ul> Collaboration<br>Expressing identity |
| Challenges            | Anxiety<br>Changing the course<br>Power as action<br>Time commitment<br>Choosing (choice)   |

I separated the categories by perceptions, values, and challenges, which enabled us to answer our first research question. From this analysis, I generated three findings, and coresearchers confirmed these findings. First, instructors perceived making changes to the course in terms of sharing power and providing choices for students as risky and



expressed anxiety in doing it wrong. Instructors articulated concern about the time commitment the change to course coconstruction required, including a lack of support to make changes. Second, instructors valued connecting with their peers from interdisciplinary backgrounds for this work and valued trust building with students. Third, instructors described several challenges to engaging in coconstruction in asynchronous learning environments. In the sections that follow, I discuss and illustrate each of these findings.

### **Perceptions: Risk Taking**

Instructors perceived teaching coconstructed curriculum as risky due to students not supporting new pedagogy, worries about doing it wrong, and time constraints. One worry instructors had was about challenging existing and traditional expectations regarding curriculum that have historically excluded diverse student voices. Patricia shared a concern of losing her job as an adjunct instructor in attempting “risky” pedagogy like cocreation. Part of the risk was from student feedback or the possibility of students not liking the format. According to Patricia:

I don’t want to lose my job! I want to remain a valuable and respected faculty member whose class students want to take and whose students leave with the skills they need to practice sound economic thinking and be able to demonstrate the course outcomes.

Like Patricia, Dr. Joy expressed concern about student feedback regarding power distribution, as she is Black and the students she taught were mostly white. This perceived risk may well be a very real risk for Dr. Joy and other faculty of color who teach in predominately white institutions. Faculty of color often face resistance and are

challenged on teaching approaches by white students (Han, 2012; Stanley, 2006; Pittman, 2010).

Instructors also perceived risk as the additional time to this work. Dr. Joy, the only instructor member in this study to design a cocreative curriculum from scratch (meaning she did not have an existing curriculum she had to adapt; instead, she created a new one), described the opportunity to choose what to put into a curriculum as a heavy load alleviated by collaborating and working as a team. Dr. Joy acknowledged the privilege and opportunity to collaborate, while recognizing collaboration often is not available timewise for many instructors who are underpaid and overworked. Instructors indicated they could relieve anxiety and alleviate risk by working collaboratively. Kim said:

For me, engaging in this particular process for this research, one of the things that happened was a huge amount of anxiety for me . . . what if I do this wrong? What if this isn't correct? And so coconstructing [the] syllabus is something that I've done a lot, it doesn't scare me, being part of this particular research group I've felt very supported by taking risks to coconstruct.

Kim discussed her personal anxiety about engaging in this work and “doing it wrong.” She described the process of engaging in student voice work as taking a risk to coconstruct. Kim found solace and support in working with her peers to take these risks and make changes to her curriculum. Although Kim shared how she took risks to coconstruct, she went on to describe it more as a fear of doing it wrong:

I think it wasn't fear to experiment. It was fear of doing something wrong. It wasn't fear of risk taking, per se. It really did have something to do with perception that perhaps I could be doing that wrong.

Teresa also worried about doing it wrong. Teresa said, “I'm worried that I'm still missing details and even big ideas. I'm wondering about possible critiques to the students-as-

partners model or ways to avoid possible pitfalls.” She stressed that taking risks to coconstruct might negatively affect students:

I told a high-achieving student with disabilities that I was exploring students-as-partners and had some concerns about restructuring classroom expectations and dynamics. She shared that it was not kind—not helpful—to change a structure when students have developed specific skill sets to be successful in one structure throughout their schooling. It made me wonder about all students—not only successful students—and the risks of making any changes without high levels of scaffolding and clear explanations of the intentions of these changes.

Teresa’s thoughts reflected the notion that altering the status quo can be risky for some students, whereas Kim’s words seemed to reflect a risk for her as the instructor. Teresa searched for teaching supports (e.g., scaffolding, clear explanations) needed to engage in coconstruction to mitigate potential risks for students.

Instructors described feeling worried about making changes to their curriculum.

Kim struggled initially with how to actualize coconstruction for her course, noting:

In terms of changes necessary for this to happen, I truly wish I could just pop a different SIM card into my brain. I see a mismatch at the moment between my actions and my thoughts and words. Something very major will need to happen for me to craft a coconstructed class as opposed to a brief coconstructed assignment.

Kim’s perception of this work as a risk presented a challenge when the work transformed from understanding coconstruction into implementing it for her course. In their analytic memos, instructors described how they took risks in challenging or disrupting traditional curriculum expectations that have become normalized and expected in undergraduate higher education. This risk was present in terms of feedback about coconstruction from students and in sharing about this work with their peers. Instructors also named time as a risk to engaging in this work. In the analysis of challenges, I review how perceived and

real risks of time commitment affected instructors in coconstructing asynchronous curriculum.

### **Values: Connecting**

Instructors shared two central values in transitioning to a coconstructed partnership model of learning that valued CSP: connecting and being part of a community of practice. One way instructors accounted for curricular change and risk taking was through support from the research team. In her interview, Dr. Joy described the nature of academia as competitive and indicated connecting with other faculty as a team who conducted research together reduced the hyper-competitive environment; she could (with support from the community of practice) focus on her goals of social justice in the curriculum for her students. According to Dr. Joy:

[In academia] there's a conflict of interest, there is limited funding, and also ideas about publishing, which journal to be published in, who gets published and who doesn't.... So that competitive aspect has really made teaching less attractive. And so I've seen some of my faculty members, when I was a student, not even really pay attention to what I, as a student, experienced in the class, because they're busy going for tenure. Right? So having the ability to collaborate and work with others takes away that competitive aspect, and maybe for some people who got into teaching because they are passionate, and they really care about making a difference in social justice and more than young folks who are out there voting and changing the world.

Dr. Joy also discussed how collaboration lessened the neoliberal, competitive feel of academia, and Patricia supported a similar claim where she shared how hearing hesitation from other instructors gave her confidence. Patricia noted an initial hesitation to engage in this work, which dissolved by having time for discussion and reflection with other colleagues who have also committed to this research:

Talking to other faculty members and recognizing their hesitation engaging in this process, their curiosity about what it would look like and the ways in which we

could do it, our limited resources, and wanting to engage in a very positive way, have it be positive for us, as well as our students. And that process of discussion and collaboration that we had was highly beneficial for me.

Instructors valued the opportunity to connect with colleagues from different academic backgrounds and leaned on each other to share stories; by doing so, they were able to counter the perceived risks of cocreation in asynchronous curriculum. I discuss sharing within a community of practice in more detail when I address the second research question.

### **Challenges**

Instructors shared several challenges in transitioning to a coconstructed partnership model of learning that valued CSP. Instructors felt the asynchronous nature of teaching was challenging along with the additional time commitment this work necessitated. Time was a concern, as not all instructors have the privilege of extra time for curriculum development, specifically with keeping up with new teaching practices that may require more personalized attention for students and knowing how and when to intervene when sharing power with students.

### **Asynchronous Environment**

Instructors found the nature of asynchronous learning to be challenging to build student–instructor partnerships. Jennifer struggled to visualize coconstruction in her curriculum, stating, “I am really struggling to understand how this will all work in an asynchronous environment.” Teresa mentioned in her memo, “Incorporating this model into asynchronous is the real challenge and this is an issue that needs to be addressed.” Kim discussed feeling coconstruction might be easier to approach for in-person courses,

noting, “I find the notion of coconstruction particularly challenging in a fully online environment.”

Patricia and Kim shared in more detail challenges to asynchronous learning; for instance, Patricia noted:

In this process of coconstruction, it makes it very complex because the question and answer session that might be presented to an entire class synchronously, the asynchronous pattern, as soon as I get the same question asked twice, I then send that question out to the entire class. And so there’s repetition. And then, you know, you’re never sure if a student read an email. So I do lots of repetition of concepts. And this coconstruction was one of them. And I even to the point that I wonder a drawback was that if there were even some students that realized this was going on, that they had this opportunity, because if they didn’t read the email, they would never have known, they would have just gone about their business doing the class and could have potentially been unaware. I don’t control that. And so asynchronous makes it complex.

I share more about each instructor’s curriculum when I review the analysis of research question 4. In Patricia’s courses, students were able to negotiate the weight of their assignments. Students could choose to have their homework weighted higher than the exams or elect to not count homework toward their final grades and instead have their exams be weighted more heavily. Each student would have their own negotiated learning contract, reviewed and accepted by Patricia, for the course. Patricia struggled with not knowing what content students had read and whether they missed negotiating their course contract. Kim described a similar feeling as Patricia in feeling challenged in not knowing what students had received in their learning, noting, “In a fully online environment, it is difficult to know how students are interpreting either classroom contracts regarding community and how students feel regarding power overall, particularly when there are no assignments looking at [coconstruction/negotiation].”

## Time Commitment

Instructors perceived making changes to the course in terms of sharing power and providing choices for students as risky, expressed anxiety in doing it wrong, and were concerned about the time commitment the change required (including a lack of support to make changes). Specific challenges included anxiety in doing the wrong thing, worry about repercussions if students or peers disapproved, fear of loss of status as a result, and concern about how much or how little choice to provide for students. Although time was a perceived challenge, and instructors noted transitioning to new methods of teaching did take extra time, they noted these methods were well worth the effort. Instructors noted as class sizes increase in the future, the time commitment for student voice work may impact the instructor experience to offer such personalized choices for students; time is also a scarce resource for adjuncts who are not usually not compensated for curriculum development. Teresa shared, “Now my worries are about the time requirements for me and for my students, and students feeling burdened by needing to take the lead in meta-aspects of a course.” Patricia described time as a limited resource for adjunct faculty. She worried coconstruction takes considerable time—not only in developing the curriculum, but also in delivering and supporting students in construction. Patricia stated:

I am an economist, and the first lesson in economics is that resources are scarce. And that includes me and my time, and any other professor that might engage in this. Resources are scarce, and we do not have an unlimited amount of time. And 40 is a very small cohort for me. My typical students range from 80 to 120. And I know other students, other instructors have many more students. So that’s a significant challenge.

I chose quotes from Teresa and Patricia to illustrate how instructors described the time commitment to design and support coconstructed curriculum as a challenge to engaging

in this work. One part of the challenge of the time commitment was keeping up with these changes.

### **Keeping Up**

Instructors described keeping up as a challenge related to time commitment.

Patricia described additional steps she had to take to check in with students who had chosen to adjust their course requirements:

So, certainly, for me, my challenge was grading all those differences, keeping track, where in a typical term, where I have all students [doing] the same thing, I can simply run a program that will tell me who has and who has not completed a quiz, for example, and just say, “Hey, you know, I noticed you didn’t finish the quiz. So, you know, make sure you attend to that.” But I didn’t want to send that email to a student who wasn’t doing quizzes. So, then I would have to edit the program that I ran, and, you know, make that change.

Patricia described additional time on her part to communicate with her students. Kim had a different experience, as she worried about how long designing new curriculum would take. She wondered what she would have to give up to keep doing this work in the future:

The idea that it [coconstruction] was not only a risk, and it wasn’t clear ahead of time what it was going to be, but it was going to take a week, completely stopped [the conversation]. And, so, I learn new things and get very excited about sharing them with people. And what I’m seeing from this work with power is that I anticipate running into the same level of resistance of someone saying, “How long did it take you to do this? What did you have to give up in order to do it?” And that’s in a department where a number of my colleagues already do engage in coconstruction. And they ask really thoughtful questions about it. But this whole notion of how much time will I have to do what I need to do seems to impede what happens with the notion of coconstruction.

Kim felt the time commitment of this work presented a risk and worried about the unclear and changing nature of coconstruction. Kim also struggled with understanding how much support to provide students and how and when to intervene.



## **How and When to Intervene**

In the previous section, I presented how Patricia and Kim shared the time needed for new forms of communication, personalization, and support created challenges for them in engaging in coconstructed curricula. How instructors support students will most likely vary depending on subject and the style of the instructor. Jennifer worried about exerting her power when students misunderstand or misrepresent the intended content:

I read somebody had taken one of the chapters out of context; I think she just misread a word. And, so, what she wrote was actually the opposite of the chapter. And, so, I felt very stuck. As to how to intervene with that, and, so, on one hand, it's great that they're educating each other, but also by giving them the power, they can falsely educate somebody, which is always a risk in a nutrition course. And I probably have, I have about 50 students, and, so, the discussions are always a challenge to read all of them, to read the posts.

Jennifer was concerned about feeling the need to overextend herself when students have the choice about what to read and when students drive more of the learning experience. She worried she would have to dedicate additional time she did not have to read or check on every post from students. Kim struggled with support in terms of clarifying and explaining to students and wondered how many times she would need to review the new coconstruction practices with students. Kim noted:

I think that the benefit that I noticed was that it allowed people to manage a piece of the class and to take away some stress. But the challenge was that they just questioned again and again if they were doing it right.

Naming how instructors worked through challenges to coconstruction included working in an asynchronous learning environment, time commitment, ability to keep up, and how and when to intervene. Identification of these challenges addresses a gap in the literature on student–instructor partnerships that has underreported challenges (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

**RQ2: How Does the Process of Engaging in PAR Inform Instructors' Perspectives on the Distribution of Power Between Students and Instructors Within a Coconstructed Curriculum?**

The research team generated two central themes, “sharing within a community of practice” and “systemic power,” to address how the process of PAR informed instructors’ perspectives on the distribution of power between students and instructors within a coconstructed curriculum. Instructors worried about the risks of distributing power with students in their curriculum and started making changes after sharing within a community of practice. Systemic power affected how instructors engaged in building coconstructed curriculum and how they distributed power to their students. I detail the importance of how PAR informed instructors’ perspectives and the impact systemic power had on how instructors made decisions for their curriculum.

***Sharing Within a Community of Practice***

I established two final categories, sharing and collaboration, in identifying how engaging in the process of PAR informed instructors’ perspectives on the distribution of power between students and instructors in the asynchronous curriculum. Instructors leaned on the support of each other in the PAR group to share stories and connect, which affected their confidence to make changes and redistribute power in their curriculum. Coresearchers confirmed the themes of both sharing and collaboration from my analysis.

In response to the first research question, instructors described feeling anxious, worried, or hesitant to engage in student voice work to coconstruct asynchronous curriculum. Our finding for this research question about the impact of sharing within a community of practice was significant to understanding how instructors overcame their concerns to make changes and redistribute power in their curricula. Sharing in this study,

was a process of reflective discussion, a process of sharing of stories, sharing similar and different experiences, and active and reflective listening. Instructors described how they made sense of our research and of the collective experience of living in a pandemic and conducting research through a sharing of experiences with colleagues from interdisciplinary backgrounds.

I first review how the categories of sharing and collaboration were determined in analysis and then support this analysis with quotes from the data. I also show how the process of engaging in PAR informed instructor perspectives around power and collaboration. I isolated the data in Atlas.ti by instructor interviews and memos, and I ran a filter in Atlas.ti of the 277 codes associated with coresearcher interviews and memos. To understand relationships and patterns in this isolated data set of instructor interviews and memos, I searched for codes associated with connecting, the value determined from analysis of our first research question. I broadened the analysis to include dimensions of power and community as these subjects relate to the second research question. Finally, in a review of top codes associated with instructor interviews and memos, I noticed the code of “female community in academia” was a frequently tagged code for this group; I wanted to understand if this code was important in understanding PAR and power for instructors, so I included it in our analysis.

In the filtered analysis that included codes associated with “connecting,” “academia,” “power,” and “community,” 61 codes came up, varying from being used once to eight times per code. I reviewed all 61 codes and removed any codes that did not fit the intended analysis of understanding power and collaboration, leaving 51 total codes.

Quotes from all 51 codes were put into a table and organized into prominent categories (see Appendix O).

The first category established was collaboration, which included subcategories of “collaboration as an opportunity for change,” “to build community,” “to learn from others,” “finding acceptance and community in the online space,” and “accepting and acknowledging cultural differences around learning shifted perspectives around power.” In answering the first research question, instructors identified connecting with their colleagues as an important value to this work. In understanding how PAR informed instructors’ perspectives to share power, instructors noted valuing connecting and collaborating. Patricia shared:

There’s so much to be gained from collaborating. First of all, it’s a very unique perspective for me because while in my work at my other college, I have the opportunity to engage with other female faculty in different disciplines. There are no other women faculty members that I engage with on a regular basis. In my field, in my discipline, I am the only one. And, so, it’s huge. It’s huge to hear the voices of other female faculty members. It’s tremendously beneficial to me to hear the other voices of faculty from other disciplines, the concerns that I hear them raising about some of it.

Patricia noted she “felt recognized in the voices of other faculty members” when she heard them express hesitation about this work. Teresa described how higher education can at times be a siloed experience for instructors and delineated how she reacts to counter this experience by cultivating a community mindset of sharing:

I want to circle back just a little bit about transparency—I didn’t spend most of my professional career in academia—I worked in a public school setting. And I didn’t have my professional experiences where people wanted to withhold information. I had experiences where you shared because you were all contributing to the welfare of others. I feel like I bring that into higher ed and sometimes feel that it’s not what’s around me—I wish that there was more transparency and openness and willingness to share. So, I’m always happy to share anything I’m working on, or add anybody to my D2L [Desire 2 Learn

Learning Management System]. And I wish that we saw that and more as how we support each other.

Teresa went on to say how a PAR process of sharing supports her goals of being community oriented:

I did recognize that the collaborative process can bring about different and unexpected directions, which I think is beneficial. I also appreciated the way it meant that lots of people could bring experiences, wisdom, and share and contribute, and that there were attempts to have reduced status and have a sort of shared levels of contribution.

Kim shared about the importance for her to have a community of women collaborators and how traditional power dynamics in academia can be a tough place for women:

Part of it is because of who each of the individuals are. But I also think that it was a safer space for me, even as a senior faculty member, and being female, I think I would have felt differently. If our group was half men and half women, I would have felt differently if people grabbed and held the stage in terms of conversation strategies differently. One of the things to be gained from collaborating with female faculty, is also getting people's insights on how they survived as women in the academy.

She went on to describe how the PAR process has affected her as an instructor:

Being able to collaborate with the group of individuals as we all are, and seeing the richness and the thoughtfulness and the care that everyone has put into, volunteering comments about who we are and what that means. And what that means [is that] your classes were really powerful. And I think, again, that there is an element of safety that can be gained from collaborating.

Jennifer, like Kim, appreciated the opportunity to build community with her female colleagues:

It just feels like there's all these intersections, I think being a group of females is just helpful because we don't have that other layer that is sometimes around when males are in the mix as well. But I thought that this was really important. In fact, maybe that's the most important part of the whole process.

Jennifer discussed the importance of sharing within the PAR community for this research:

I've really appreciated people being willing to share their experiences and their materials. And I think it's made me a much better instructor being able to see what others are doing.

Dr. Joy shared how the collaborative process relieved the burden of individualism and how collaboration built toward a shared community, stating, "The collaborative aspect of it is enormous, as teaching teachers, we carry a heavy load of deciding what to give the students and what to keep to ourselves, as we are creating these courses." Dr. Joy noted although there are benefits to collaboration, it is imperative coresearchers do not assume collaboration simply solves all issues related to power and oppression in academia:

And I don't know if we can ever really shed all of the power or the oppression that we feel even if we're doing participatory action research. It sounds nice, and it sounds, it is a great idea. And I think it's being done, if it's being done well. But I also still want us to remain cautious of the fact that we still hold these positions in society.

The intention to center non-male and BIPOC instructors created safer spaces for instructors to share and be vulnerable with each other. By sharing within a community, instructors felt supported in working to make changes to their curriculum. Sharing within a community was a significant finding in contributing to our team's understanding of how instructors could redistribute power in their classrooms through a collaborative and reflective process. The finding of sharing within a community did not fully account for comprehensive understandings of power within the curriculum, leading us to our second theme: systemic power.

### ***Awareness of Systemic Power***

The category of systemic power included subcategories of "reflecting," "recognizing one's own power," "how acting with power can be oppressive," and

“exercising to share power can feel risky.” In her interview, Dr. Joy shared about working in a system that can be oppressive and how intentions do not equal impact:

Working with female faculty sometimes has its own challenges, because sometimes power is systemic. If we work with a person, regardless of the agenda, if they have bought into some of these oppressive ways of thinking, it doesn't matter what the agenda is, sometimes women actually can be more oppressive. Women of color, you know, we can add all these intersecting positions, we could actually be more brutal to each other. You know? I don't know if we can ever really, truly coconstruct anything, right?

Dr. Joy's reflection about systemic power is important to this work. Instructors can have all the right intentions, and oppression can still be present. Participating in a community and being able to reflect on her power brought a new awareness to how Jennifer approached teaching. Jennifer noted:

In terms of coconstruction, I would say that and again, this has been only a couple of weeks, but I'm really aware of my power and in trying to give that away, and I don't think I would have been aware of it before we started this process. I would have thought that I really didn't have much power. I'm always begging my students to get in touch with me and you know, contribute more and, you know, do they have any different ideas?

I chose quotes from Dr. Joy and Jennifer to highlight the importance of bringing an awareness of systemic power to this work. Both quotes illustrated how personal awareness of one's own power is critical. Although awareness of one's own power is important, it is also important for each instructor to choose to distribute and share this power in their curriculum.

### **Distribution of Power**

In responses to the first research question, instructors built two categories named power that were later clarified as “personal power” and “power as action.” I defined personal power in this research as the power each person has in their ability to make

decisions for themselves and for others. Personal power is highly informed by identity and privilege—more specifically, the person’s awareness of this privilege. Jennifer described a sense of awakened awareness as a result of engaging in this research:

I’ve been teaching in an async[hronous] setting for a while, so that part was not new to me, I think the newest piece of this, and probably will be at the end of the term, is about understanding where my power is, and that I’m trying to create a space to give others power that I didn’t realize I wasn’t giving them before. And again, with that, it’ll just be interesting to see what it all looks like, in the end.

Jennifer also noted, “I’m really trying to be conscientious of where my power is and making sure that I’m not being the one completely in charge.” Dr. Joy mentioned a different perspective on personal power, stating, “The students themselves, as mostly white students that I’m teaching, still kind of have somewhat of a position of power from a sociological standpoint.” As a Black woman, Dr. Joy reflected on her given power as an instructor in academia contrasted with societal privilege and power gifted to people who are white in the United States.

In her interview, Patricia described power as a process, noting, “The idea, for me, the power process, has been engaging with students, meeting students where they are, and recognizing that individual students’ needs differ.” Patricia noted the literal position changes of where an instructor stands when engaged in student voice work:

The instructor in a traditional model, I mean, from standing in a lecture and you have a thinker, like a statue that everyone is staring at. Or not, staring at their phones and so forth. But this positionality literally changes, and figuratively as well, where you’re going to meet the student on equal ground. And both of you bring questions and then develop the coursework, whether it’s the syllabus, or an individual assignment, or an individual rubric or individual grading, and then the student presents what they’ve constructed, and then the two share power in a coconstructed asynchronous situation.



Patricia described this work as more than a mindset shift, that the redistribution of power is a literal shift of the body and mind in coconstructing curriculum with students.

Although instructors reflected on power and made changes to their curriculum with support from the community, they at times wrestled with the distribution of power.

Jennifer described a reflection where she had disagreed with a student about their self-feedback:

I'm noticing especially as I'm reviewing what they've self-graded, I might even see something that they've written that was sort of self-deprecating, like, I didn't do a good enough job here. Then I write to them: you did a great job there. And I think, you know, I just took my power, and kind of overcompensated for what they had said, even though I think it was true, and it was positive. But still, I should not have taken that away from them because they had really been the ones to want to look, look critically at their own work. So that's been interesting. And, you know, I'm hoping by the end of the term, I will have gotten much better with that, but at least I've become more aware of it.

At times, instructors wanted to remain in power. In a memo after a conversation with Patricia, I wrote, "Patricia indicated a need to have control over the percentage of rigor, yet wanted students to be able to exercise choice and agency in how they accomplished course outcomes and goals." Patricia's interest in a distributed power model represented a negotiated power structure where instructors share power with students.

Instructors approached distributing power differently. In a course in this study that implemented elements of self-grading without providing much power to students, one of the students, Scarlett, commented, "I think there needs to be more of just like, a balanced out power instead of just little moments of asking for [self-grading only]. I don't know, especially when students aren't used to being involved that way." I share the student experience to contextualize how the distribution of power is not only an instructor

perception and was also important to students. I share the student perspective about coconstruction later in the chapter.

**RQ3: How Do Instructors Describe the Process and Challenges of Developing an Asynchronous Course to Include Components of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Student Coconstruction, and Self-Grading?**

The first research question outlined the instructors' perceptions, values, and challenges to this work. The second research question outlined how sharing within a community informed instructors' awareness of systemic power and the distribution of power in their curriculum.

The intention for this third research question was to identify processes and challenges directly related to the components for which we attempted to design, including culturally sustaining practices, coconstruction, and self-grading. I outline my findings for culturally sustaining practices, coconstruction, and self-grading by building on analysis from the first two research questions and by reviewing quotes from the data. Instructor coresearchers validated these findings and confirmed their quotes used to understand and answer our third research question.

***Culturally Sustaining Practices***

In Chapter 2, I discussed several constructs related to culturally sustaining practices, including cultural and linguistic pluralism, resistance to monolingualism, resistance to deficit student approaches to learning, democracy in the curriculum, and pedagogy that is mutually beneficial to both students and instructors. Patricia shared about what being a culturally sustaining instructor meant to her, whereas Kim, Jennifer, and Teresa were challenged with actualizing culturally sustaining practices. Dr. Joy developed her curriculum with the research team in Spring 2021 and in Summer 2021 but

had her course cut from the Fall 2021 teaching schedule. As a result, she was unable to teach her coconstructed curriculum, so data from Dr. Joy are about her experience building the initial curriculum.

Dr. Joy reflected on her own experiences to inform how she approached culturally sustaining practices in her curriculum:

But speaking from my own perspective, as an immigrant, as one who's always considered as other, right, I really am usually sensitive to the idea of anything that is named culturally specific, or culturally sustaining, or anything that has to do with culture. Because while I understand that these are ideas that promote equity, and, you know, across identities, and ensure access to opportunities, sometimes I find them to be overused.

Dr. Joy reflected on the cautions of overusing terms that claim to support students of color but perhaps, at times, do not. In her interview, Patricia discussed recognizing the diversity of experiences and cultures in her classroom as assets to student learning. To Patricia, being culturally sustaining is an effort to recognize key elements or practices that foster cultural pluralism as an integral part of the learning process and how this effort by both the instructor and student works toward positive social transformation. Patricia noted:

So, culturally sustaining pedagogy, the recognizing the key elements, fostering cultural pluralism, as a part of schooling, and positive social transformation, and revitalization. This perspective, I think, of students meeting them where they are, is recognizing that social transformation can happen in a positive way. That we are doing more than just, say, well, this is our vessel, and we need to fill it, which is the student as the vessel, and that banking model of education.

Patricia went on to contrast culturally sustaining pedagogy to deficit traditional models of education, where the instructor holds the knowledge and students receive this knowledge. She mentioned acknowledgement of her own power in the classroom has helped inform

her understanding of students' cultures and how it is valuable to the educational experience:

And, so, cultural pluralism, I want to recognize different cultures, different ways of knowing, and different ways of representing that knowledge and also, whose voice matters. So in the classroom, under the banking model I felt that, that's my early professorship was, this is the information that you need to have, and I need to give it to you, and you need to show me that you have it. Right? And, so now I recognize and find joy. I am always surprised by the joy I find in a very pleasant and engaging way of students' knowledge and their voices. And so that's what this power has helped me to do to inform this perspective about students' culture, that students' culture varies, and that we can move forward in an educational perspective of higher education, that's very different from this old thinking model.

Patricia connected CSP to an understanding of her own power and how she sought to redistribute this power to students. She described her reflections on cultural pluralism and power as very different from the way she was taught and how she finds joy in hearing from students.

Jennifer shared about embracing culture in terms of age and creating opportunities for students to be assets in their learning:

It seems like the cultural piece is often the age culture, rather than, you know, family background, which is fine. It's just often different. And then I think about the age difference between me and them. And I teach a nutrition course, it's community nutrition course. So, it's not a personal nutrition course. But I do have them engage at the beginning with their own perspectives around nutrition because I find that they'll just keep going back to that if we don't kind of go through that first, and then have a wider view of the community and how economics and politics and the social climate impact all of their own food and nutrition behavior within their community. I feel like at least I'm giving them the opportunity to share what's important to them, and what they see is impacting their lives. And I give them the opportunity to bring in culture when they can; in fact, I really encourage it. And, so, sometimes it's just a huge surprise when it doesn't come in.

Jennifer described an inclusive mindset of creating opportunities for students to share, which addressed the democratic constructs for CSP and potentially an effort for mutual

benefit; yet, this mindset does not address intentional efforts for other constructs, such as cultural and linguistic pluralism or resistance to monolingualism.

Kim mentioned her strategy to learning about her students and approaching CSP from a teaching perspective:

I can't imagine being any kind of teacher without addressing the kinds of dimensions that affect learners' lives. So for me, knowing where someone has come from, or knowing how they've been socialized, educationally, I think is really, really important. I think one other dimension of culturally sustaining pedagogy is that it doesn't always relate to finding the pedagogy that a particular kind of learner is most familiar with. I think it also relates to bigger values from managing a classroom and managing learners.

Kim discussed her approach to culturally relevant teaching and remaining inclusive of a diversity of learner's experiences, but she did not mention elements of cultural pluralism, resisting white-centeredness, or a mutually beneficial impact that CSP necessitates.

Teresa shared about her dedication to having a student-centered practice, saying, "My focus is my students." When asked about CSP, she acknowledged how CSP can have different meanings to different people, and can therefore, have inconsistencies in its interpretation. She said, "I have read about culturally sustaining pedagogy a bit, but I still feel like it's slippery in coming to places where you can make definitive statements. . . I do my absolute best to honor student lived experiences." Students in Teresa's courses noted she created weekly discussions centered on how the course materials related to their lived experiences, an important start to creating opportunities for students to relate to course material.

All instructors demonstrated a mindset of students as assets to their learning, an important element to CSP. Overall, instructors in this study did not explicitly identify

moments related to decentering whiteness; resisting monolingualism; or personal steps in creating curriculum to support, affirm, and sustain cultural and linguistic pluralism.

### ***Coconstruction***

In our analysis related to the first and second research questions, we identified several challenges reported by instructors about developing asynchronous courses that included components of CSP, student coconstruction, and self-grading. These challenges were: (a) teaching in an asynchronous environment, (b) the time commitment needed to keep up with offering choices to students in the curriculum, and (c) how and when to intervene when sharing power with students. As instructors built opportunities for cocreation and shared democracy with students, they ran into another challenge: simply creating the opportunities for choice and for students to exercise their agency did not automatically yield results of increased agency and learning for students online. I first share how instructors described the process of coconstructing curriculum, and then present findings about how creating choices for students did not inherently mean they felt ready or able to make these choices.

To understand how instructors described the processes and challenges related to coconstruction, I begin by writing a paragraph for each of the categories from the card sort analysis (Saldaña, 2016). In defining each category, I noticed not all codes fit with each category and some were better represented in another category. As I moved codes to better fit with the represented category, I noted several key connections and takeaways.

In moving cards to better fit the defined category, choice was connected to personal power through two codes: choice as empowering and choice as power. The distinction of choice as a connected category was highly important, as I had originally

written a memo in my analysis that I thought the category of choice kept showing up because our study was inherently about choosing and our interview questions asked about choice. I noted the category of choice would need to be revisited and possibly renamed and associated codes moved. This could have meant codes that represented words (e.g., choice or choosing) would appear somewhat frequently and instructor coresearchers would naturally categorize them together. Instructor coresearchers initially were unsure of how to best label the category associated with “choice.” There were many codes associated with choice, an indication it may have been a prominent theme and not simply a representation of the interview questions. To confirm a categorical representation of choice in the data, I ran a code distribution report in Atlas.ti to query the word choice across all codes in the data. Choice was used in some variety as a code 32 times and was closely related to codes that used choice 70 times, indicating a categorical representation in the data.

Codes in the choice category described the act of “choosing as challenging,” that “choice helped extend learning,” “choice as control,” “connecting choice and success,” “choice as helpful,” and “wanting more choice.” There were potential connections from choice to categories in the data, including “personal power,” “engagement in learning,” and “knowledge development.” I next ran a query in Atlas.ti to separate out choice as a code from instructor interviews, memos, and student interviews. I share a brief description of choice from the student perspective and then outline choice from the instructor perspective. I go into more detail on coconstruction and how it unfolded for instructors later in the chapter.

Students described several experiences with choice. Dakota said they did not like having a choice, as they wanted clear expectations and rules, and then went on to say having options for learning would be beneficial—suggesting that choosing was not the issue but that Dakota instead preferred the need for clear guidelines on how to engage with choice in curriculum. Jacquelyn described feeling motivated when having a choice, and Parker appreciated having the freedom of choosing to engage with materials to heighten his learning and not having to review materials with which he was already familiar. Yo Yo, Sarah, Amadine, Lizzie, Robin, Micah, Enola, and Elise described how choice helped them learn. Scarlett described the option to have more choices would help her to extend her learning.

Instructors described not knowing how much choice to provide and challenges of providing students with more opportunities to choose in their learning. After reflecting on options for how to engage with coconstruction in her course, Jennifer perceived that students might be overwhelmed by decision-making during the pandemic. She spent time hearing from other instructors in the group who incorporated choice into the curriculum in the summer term, whereas Jennifer would be teaching her coconstructed course in the subsequent fall quarter. She decided, “I will add less choice [provide less choices] than I originally planned and I will give them opportunities to self-grade pieces of their work and then they will self-grade the final project.” Jennifer shared students had opportunities to take course exams twice, outlining the option to retake an exam as a choice for students to opt in to retaking an exam for a higher grade. In meetings after making these changes to the curriculum, Jennifer shared she still did not quite know how much choice to offer students.



Patricia opted for a negotiated syllabus where students had choices about how they wanted to demonstrate they met the course outcomes. This negotiated structure meant students could choose how they wanted elements in the course to be weighted. For example, students could choose to weight their exams at 100% and not have to do the homework, or give themselves credit for the homework so exams were not weighted as high. Patricia mentioned the extra time needed to adjust to varying student needs as a challenge, with one exception:

The tradeoff is the benefits that I noticed from the engagement, because for the students who did have limited resources and wanted to limit their categories [or reduce their workload] for demonstrating course outcomes, they were able to engage more deeply.

Patricia's intention was to "keep a system of choice that allows students to engage, or use their limited resources to be their most successful."

Teresa used choice in the classroom as an opportunity for students who hope to move into the career pathway as a speech-language pathologist to choose to extend their learning based on their individual interests and needs:

My concern is I don't want them constrained by the rubric and the self-grading. . . . They'll be better off when they are entering into grad school when they do a little more than the minimum. I don't want them penalized for not doing enough. So, I'm just trying to be really careful about what the optional extensions are so they can figure out where they can challenge themselves.

Teresa described choice as a shared responsibility with students and took great care to provide support and scaffolding when giving students choices in their learning.

Kim adapted an assignment so students would have choices about the format they wanted to submit and provided opportunities for self-grading. She described encountering resistance from students who were afraid they would "do it wrong" and how, as an

instructor, she could build opportunities for choice and coconstruction; however, providing these choices did not mean a student would engage with these choices, especially if the student perceived the risks as too high.

In reflecting, Dr. Joy cautioned those who engage in this work to continuously question what may be reproduced. What Dr. Joy found exciting and revolutionary about offering choice was the accountability students held for themselves. Students set the limit on their learning, not the instructor. Dr. Joy had planned to have a completed, coconstructed course where students would determine course outcomes and assignment based on a predetermined textbook with a central goal or theme to explore African conceptions of gender, sexuality, and power in Sierra Leone.

Choice was an important part of the student and instructor experience of coconstruction. Instructors grappled with how much choice to provide for students, a consideration that intersected with instructor understandings of power, oppression, trust, and community. Instructors made decisions, offered support, and took risks to build cocreative curriculum by relying on community with other instructors in the PAR group. A connection between the instructor and student experiences with choice was how choice extended learning for students or offered ways for students to better engage in their learning.

### **Offering Choice Does Not Always Yield Student Feelings of Agency**

At times, students operated their agency by choosing not to more deeply engage in the work or by choosing not to contribute more than what was minimally expected from the instructor. Jennifer described it was challenging when she created opportunities for students who then did not jump right in. Jennifer said in her interview:

I try to create assignments to allow each student to bring in important aspects from their lives. When I ask students to write about the significant factors that influence their food choices, I have been disappointed when a student does not discuss their family background or experiences, but instead writes about the latest Tik Tok video that's now gone viral about, making these little sushi roll things. It's just interesting, it's not what I would have thought of in terms of culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Dr. Joy shared one reason students do not readily adopt choice or agency may be due to a history of oppression as an obstacle to building trust and how many students have endured steep challenges to embrace the opportunity to self-direct their own learning. If students have been exposed to oppression in school, as many students of color continue to experience (Jackson & Labissiere, 2017), they may not trust their instructors, and building trust may be more difficult. These findings are in line with discussions regarding the fear of freedom (Freire, 1970) that offering choices to students does not mean all students feel safe, comfortable, or able to make decisions and choices in their learning.

To understand factors instructors used to support students in choosing and moving from independent to self-directed learning, I continued with a cycle of journaling and reflecting on relationships in the categories established in Round 2 of the initial analysis from the first research question. I wrote, “Student agency in online learning curricula is dependent on a trusting student–instructor relationship.” I think of student agency as the ability for a student to make choices, claim their learning (Rich, 1977), and to move from independent learning to self-directed learning strategies. In my journal, I listed all categories and codes associated with how instructors in this study attempted to build trust to encourage and promote agency with students:

- Communication
- Personalization
- Flexibility

- Built community
- Offering choice
- Evaluating curriculum through the lens of a history of oppression and exclusion

After reviewing the codes associated with agency in the card sort and noting categories associated with building trust (i.e., trusting oneself, self-awareness), I noted the two codes under the category for agency were better associated with the definition of trust, leaving one category: trusting. This change was important, because it reflected a tangible need among both students and instructors in the partnership process. I used a narrative analysis practice (Saldaña, 2016) to write a sentence to connect trusting to the related topic of how students make choices in their learning. I wrote, “A trusting student–instructor relationship is an important and essential element to how students make choices to self-direct their learning.”

Trust was a critical and essential factor for students to make choices to direct their learning. It is important to acknowledge trust and relationship building are areas on which instructors can focus within teaching and curriculum development, as many students have histories of a lack of trust with instructors and within systems of education that have not built trust (Freire, 1970, Ellsworth, 1989). Additionally, the pilot study indicated that structured support was important when coconstructing online. Instructors offered structured support through scaffolding of assignments with clear communications to support students in making choices to self-direct their learning. In summary, simply creating choices for students does not guarantee they will deeply engage in the process of learning or the process of choosing. One factor that did contribute to student engagement in their coursework was a trusting relationship with their instructor.

### *Self-Grading*

All instructors opted to include some form of self-grading in their curriculum. Dr. Joy had planned to include how grading would be determined as part of the discussion she would have with her students at the beginning of the course. Teresa included elements of self-grading in weekly rubrics for her students, Kim and Jennifer had self-graded assignments, and Patricia had a self-graded assignment—including a negotiated curriculum where students chose the weight of the items in the course.

Kim expressed nervousness about having her students self-grade, noting, “I approached it with trepidation, like a number of other things, and simply told people they would be doing self-grading. I don’t think I scaffolded it particularly well.” Upon reflection, Kim shared if she were to do self-grading again, “I would run [the self-graded assignment] by students ahead of time to make sure that what I thought made complete sense, made sense to them.”

Teresa spent a lot of time figuring out what self-grading would look like in her course so she could best support her students. Teresa prepared her students to self-grade by presenting it as a skill to be acquired in a professional setting. In discussing this topic, Teresa stated:

I didn’t want coconstruction to have [students] feel[ing] that they weren’t getting rich feedback that would shape their understanding of the material. So I made sure to balance the work, [and have students] reflect on [their] work. I also tried to provide the rationale. I said, we’re working on self-grading using rubrics, because professionals work in settings where they use guidelines, like federal guidelines for IEP [Individual Education Program] writing, or request for proposals for initiatives grants. We as professionals have to follow rubrics, and we have to measure ourselves whether or not we met with the specifications.

Teresa challenged her students to engage in this work by supporting them with the same kind of feedback she would have provided if she had been grading the students:

So, I said, this is where you go in your work. You're the one who looks at your reports and decides whether or not they met what was being asked for. So, I kind of told them that it was part of seeing themselves in a professional setting and the writing that goes with the professional setting. And then I've tried to provide the feedback that I would have provided even if I'd have given the grade as opposed to them giving themselves the grade.

As students came to Teresa with questions about self-grading, she responded by offering additional review for anyone who needed it:

I [offered to] read [their] stuff first, if [they were] concerned. I did have a few students who I think over graded themselves, but I think they didn't know what they didn't know. So, I would say, you might want to do such and such. I had more students under grade themselves where I said, "this is amazing work." You know, "Please, consider grading yourself more generously in the future."

Teresa felt her dedication to the details of how to support students with self-grading resulted in higher quality student work:

So far, the student work this term with the self-grading rubric is a much higher quality than ever before. I had decided that if they were going to grade themselves, then they better have everything that they need to do a good job. As I thought, a few students are harder on themselves than they should be. I've been telling them to grade themselves more generously, because they did a great job. I still provide feedback about strengths and possible areas for growth, just as if I were giving a letter grade. They would be receiving higher grades if I were grading them because many of them are grading themselves at 9 out of 10, and I would have given full points.

Jennifer decided to provide less choices for students than she had planned originally and to offer a high amount of structure to self-grading. Jennifer found without choices related to self-grading, it emerged to be a challenge for her course:

With the self-grading, what I've realized is that the students that I would have given probably a top grade to are the most critical of themselves and tend to grade themselves more harshly than I would have rated them. The ones I wouldn't have given a top grade to are the ones that are giving themselves a top grade. And at

this point, I'd say it's about half the class is grading themselves harsher than I would, and half the class is grading themselves much more leniently than I would have graded them. And that's tough because I'm not sure where it is that I should be stepping in, and I've let them know that I always put in comments, [such as] "Did you think about this?" It will be interesting to see how this pans out in the end, for sure.

Jennifer's comments related to the earlier finding about trying to determine how and when to intervene.

In summary, instructors were challenged in actualizing CSP, instructors opted to engage in coconstruction through providing choices to students in various ways, and instructors recognized that offering choice does not automatically yield student engagement or agency—an important takeaway from the process of providing choice as a way to construct curriculum with students. Instructors approached self-grading differently and found challenges in self-grading when choice was not provided.

#### **RQ4: How Does the Process of Student–Instructor Course Coconstruction Unfold for Students and Instructors in an Asynchronous Learning Environment?**

The research team generated three key findings in response to the fourth research question. First, learning online is different from learning in person, which necessitates different approaches to coconstruction for asynchronous learning than in-person learning. Second, choice, supported by a trusting student–instructor relationship; building community; and engagement in coursework, underscored by risk, has the potential to enhance student learning. Third, instructors approached reconstruction differently, from minimal coconstructed curriculum, to moderate, to fully coconstructed.

I first address the context of learning and teaching online and follow with parts that outline the student and instructor experiences with coconstruction. I outline analysis of student experiences with coconstruction, which I elaborate on in Chapter 5. I outline

instructor coconstruction and summarize the instructors' experiences in building and facilitating coconstruction in asynchronous courses. All student names mentioned are pseudonyms. Instructor coresearchers reviewed and affirmed these findings and advised on connections within the student experience.

### ***Learning Online***

Students described learning online as different from in-person learning experiences and differed in their thoughts about learning online. Scarlett and Dakota did not like learning online. Scarlett felt learning online was isolating, and Dakota felt the format stifled her personal expression. Scarlett described feeling alone in her online class, noting, "[Cocreation/self-grading] is a little bit funky when it comes to online, I think. Just because [online learning] is so personal and isolated, and like, it's so much of a solo journey." Dakota did not like the asynchronous nature of discussions in the online context, which impacted her ability to express herself. Dakota mentioned missing the back-and-forth dialogue that comes naturally with in-person conversations:

I don't know that, like, my concerns or my issues or my point of view, is also tough because to, like, we meet virtually and we don't have, like, scheduled times that we meet. So, it's difficult because it's pretty much just like communication via email, or, you know, if somebody leaves a response, so it's tricky because I feel like I would like there to be more of a conversation kind of, again, digging or even being curious about well, yeah, um, so it's the maybe it feels like very subtle stifling of my personal expression. But I will say that, like, I don't feel like I've been punished, like, my grade hasn't been impacted. So, that feels really nice. But I don't know that there's a dialogue about maybe some of these bigger issues that I would like to be included in discussions about community nutrition.

Other students liked learning online. Elise compared her experience in reaching out to her instructors virtually compared with her in-person courses, stating, "I think I've actually been engaging with my instructors a lot more than I would have been in an in-person



environment.” Elise attributed this statement with feeling more confident to reach out for help or connection with an instructor virtually than in person. Like Elise, Jacquelyn appreciated the flexibility learning online afforded her and felt more confident to work through learning moments with her instructor online than in person. Jacquelyn noted:

This summer term, I did one online class. And it was probably the most positive experience I’ve had with an online class. I do think some of that was the freedom we had with projects, so I could go about what was intriguing me, but at the same time, my professor was really open to meeting to discuss the direction we were going because if I’m given a really broad topic, I like to be able to meet with the professor over Zoom or over the phone to talk through it. Otherwise, I might kind of feel unconfident the whole time I’m doing the project. So, because she offered that along with the freedom, I really enjoyed that.

Hattie liked learning online, as she could learn on her own timeline and felt she retained information better due to this flexibility:

I think online learning for me has really been the best course of action. When I was doing in-person classes at [another university], I found any possible excuse to not go to class. So, being online and being able to do it in bed if I want to or at 11 o’clock at night has really been great for me. And I don’t feel like I know a lot of people when they talk about online learning feel like they’re losing something from not being in the classroom. And I just don’t, I feel like I’ve retained information better. And I have less anxiety about being in the classroom setting. And I love being able to go back on all of the content like, last night, even I was going back and looking at Week 3.

Hattie felt empowered by not having to be in a classroom with other students and was able to review content when she needed it. Lizzie shared a story of feeling anxious about the idea of learning online and how she discovered she liked the online space as a place to share and have her voice heard:

The discussion posts are nicer because you get to have the room to say something versus raising your hand and hoping that you get called on before the class ends. At first I was really anxious about those, but I’ve kind of learned to like those a lot.

Hattie, Elise, Jacquelyn, and Lizzie described feeling more confident and less anxious in online learning spaces. Amadine liked the online environment due to its access to connecting with others virtually.

Amadine also described how the virtual environment afforded her more time to contribute and participate as a community member, and to feel as if she were a part of the Portland community. She described the realities of being a working parent and how the flexibility of attending class and events virtually opened a world of opportunities to her:

I'm feeling delighted that I'm having an identity moment where I'm Portland. I wasn't Portland before that. And so I'm having a moment of joy and identity. I'm becoming part of the PSU identity, and the Portland identity and that there's some . . . that's far distant, becoming smaller. But then there's also something really interesting where the people in your own backyard, they're thinking, well, Portland's real close, I'm right here in Portland, I'll go to this Portland clinic. But if it takes 2 hours to get there and park and get in and you have to eat a snack and your kid is crying and whatever, like, there's something funny about the distortion of space and intimacy and being interactive in the community, that virtual experience allowed greater intimacy between neighbors between the people right next door to each other.

Although some students found the flexibility of learning online to be helpful, others found that how an instructor taught the course made the difference in their experiences of learning online. Yo Yo shared how instruction affected her online learning:

I think a lot of people are getting better at learning online, too. So, I think that has a lot to do with it. But also, I can tell when a classroom is facilitated very well to create that environment. It makes a huge difference. So, I think, regardless that that facilitation was still there, even if it was online, I think I would expect [it to be] very similar in person.

Yo Yo shared it may not be the online context that makes the difference for students but more the teaching practices in either environment. The idea that student success is predicated on how an instructor teaches the course, whether online or in person, supports

the research team's understanding of student success in learning online from our review of the literature.

Learning online requires different approaches to teaching and community building than in-person courses. Scarlett described learning online as an isolating and a solo journey, and Amadine had the opposite experience. She described learning online provided her with new avenues for community building and connection. Dakota felt online learning stifled her personal expression, and Elise and Jacquelyn felt more confident in reaching out to their instructors, which aided in their learning. Hattie and Lizzie liked the flexibility provided from an asynchronous environment and felt the added flexibility supported their learning.

### ***Teaching Online***

Instructors create the conditions for learning; therefore, when coconstructing curriculum, teaching online requires different approaches from in-person teaching. In the analysis, instructors described the extra time commitment needed to support students in coconstruction asynchronously as challenging.

Patricia shared how elements of inclusive teaching, such as getting to know students and developing communication rituals, are different in asynchronous courses from in-person courses:

Asynchronous is a little bit, adds another layer of complexity [to coconstructing with students] because we are not in a classroom, we are strictly online. We likely did not meet each other, my asynchronous class, we don't have remote videos, I [did] offer weekly Zoom opportunities, but they're very, the attendance is very low. Students more tend to email. So, lots and lots and lots of asynchronous emails going back and forth.

Developing online curriculum takes time, including new ways to teach and communicate with students. Designing new pedagogical practices, such as coconstructed curriculum, can take even more time—not just for instructors, but students as well. Teresa shared about her process for developing curriculum online:

Well, I realized that I think about courses [e.g., content, design] for weeks before the course begins—I knew this but I hadn't incorporated it into my general allocation of "teaching time" or time devoted to courses. If students are partners in teaching, they might also want weeks to think about things before getting involved.

Teresa noted, "Incorporating this model into asynchronous is the real challenge, and this is an issue that needs to be addressed." This reflection from one of Teresa's memos about how students may need additional time to understand how they want to participate was supported by analysis from the third research question, which indicated students may not readily adopt choosing or participating in coconstruction in ways the instructor had intended. Patricia's and Teresa's quotes supported the finding that the context of asynchronous learning adds an extra layer of complexity to coconstructing curriculum and necessitates different approaches to designing curriculum from in-person strategies.

Patricia shared how students in asynchronous learning go back and forth on email to get information from the class. This type of back-and-forth communication may complicate attempts by instructors to coconstruct curriculum. In reviewing instructor interviews about teaching online and implementing a coconstructed curriculum, I noted instructors were challenged with the new avenues of communication necessitated by sharing power and coconstruction curriculum with students. Specifically, instructors commented on student's unfamiliarity with claiming their education (Rich, 1977) or having opportunities to self-direct their learning. Kim shared, "In a completely

asynchronous setting, people don't necessarily know how to process being asked to coconstruct in the particular class." Kim struggled with getting her students to trust her in an online environment:

Another challenge is that both my undergraduate and graduate students seem deeply attached to "banking education" per Freire. I often feel I am peeling barnacles off a ship to get them to trust me and try something new that calls for coconstructed rules. I find the notion of coconstruction particularly challenging in a fully online environment.

Patricia, who taught economics, had around 40 students compared to Kim's approximately 20 students. Patricia wrestled with the back-and-forth email communication in a coconstructed curriculum and how she could connect with a larger number of students. Jennifer also found communication to be an issue regarding self-graded assignments. Jennifer, like Kim, struggled with building trust online with her students in such a quick amount of time (i.e., 10 weeks). Jennifer noted, "Do other people have more contact with their students? I have been trying to set up meetings with mine so that I can hear from them about their needs. Finding some disconnects between assignment instructions and their understanding." Instructors described coconstructing asynchronous curriculum as complex. Instructors noted concerns around time (e.g., time for development, time for students); new or different modes of communication, which time also impacted; and building trust with their students.

### ***The Student Experience***

To understand how the student experience of coconstructing unfolded in the data, I began by relating categories that were established in the Round 2 card sort analysis. Saldaña (2016) recommended changing categories that are nouns or phrases to gerund phrases to reveal a better sense of process and action between categories. To do this,

“self-grading” became “self-grading as empowering,” “reflection” became “reflecting,” “engagement” became “engaging with coursework,” and “knowledge development” became “developing knowledge.” To extend these gerunds using a narrative connecting strategy (Saldaña, 2016) the statement became: “Students are developing knowledge when they are engaging with coursework which happens when they are empowered to self-grade and reflect.” In other words, “Knowledge is developed (learning is enhanced) when students engage with coursework and happens through empowerment with self-grading and reflection.” This statement was important in linking the category of “knowledge development” with “student engagement in coursework” and “empowerment with self-grading” and informed how cocreation unfolded for students. As developing knowledge, renamed as enhanced learning, is arguably the foundational goal instructors work with students to achieve, I first outline what enhanced learning meant in the context of this study. I then describe each of the contributing elements needed to create the conditions for enhanced learning: choosing, a trusting student–instructor relationship, building community, engagement in coursework, and taking risks.

### **Enhanced Learning**

Enhanced learning is when a student is engaged and willing to do the work. Students are able to make their own connections in the course materials instead of following a connection an instructor assigns them. Yo Yo described flexibility as an important factor to directing her own learning. Yo Yo shared, “I work full time and I’m a full-time student, and then I have all kinds of family. So, any time, any flexibility, I just feel a lot more willing to do the work.” Amadine described how making her own connections extended her knowledge:

I would say the key area where self-selected elements broadened my education is it allowed me to follow the connections between topics. The teachers can create threads between assignments. But then that's only one thread, one connective link, I would be allowed [or] given that I could direct multiple assignments, multiple labs, that I could choose to focus on a connection that I made between different parts of the curriculum.

Yo Yo and Amadine enhanced their learning by directing their own learning pathways. Yo Yo also described enhanced learning when she felt safe to express their identity:

I would say that I learned [the feeling of freedom and self-expression] really quickly. Coming into college, especially being first gen[eration student], I don't think I understood some of the, I would say like social things, that come with being a college student. I think I was always a little bit more outspoken and liked asking a lot more questions. I've always been very comfortable with that as a learner. But I do think being able to see other students also feel that way. You know, within the special discussion groups, and working on labs together and stuff. Having an environment where everybody feels safe to work together and be the type of learner that they need to be. I think it made a lot more collaboration. And I think I actually learned a lot more from other students because I think everyone just felt kind of comfortable. Like I said, being their own learner, if that makes sense.

Yo Yo developed knowledge through spaces that allowed for self-expression and learning in a community of her peers. Elise, like Yo Yo, developed knowledge through self-expression and learned from the community in class. Elise appreciated when the instructor shared their identities and experiences in the curriculum:

I think the instructors that I've had have been great about talking about their own identities and connecting it to their material, the material in that way. And, so, they're kind of modeling how to do that more, which I really appreciate because I like to know who my instructors are as people. Because it helps me feel like they also perceive me as a person. And not just as like a student.

Students in this study described enhanced learning as having opportunities for self-expression, flexibility, engagement, and community building. I have included a selection of quotes from students about enhanced learning and note there were many quotes that

indicated how choice helped students to learn and enhanced their learning. Next, I review in detail how creating choices for students unfolded for students.

### **Choosing**

Students overwhelmingly indicated having choices helped them learn. Students described choosing as empowering, beneficial, helpful to personalizing their learning, and conducive to moving toward increasing levels of self-direction. Parker shared, “I got to be the agent of choosing where I want to direct my learning.” Sarah mentioned, “I think I just get more out of it when I’m able to have options.” Amadine commented, “It is very empowering [to have choices], and allows me to personalize [my learning interests].” In their interview, Robin shared they were able to focus on what was important to their learning and, as a result, they worked harder than if they had not been able to make those choices. Robin continued:

I was able to focus more on what was going to be pertinent to me, ultimately, the self-assessing, actually was pretty good. I realized I’d worked harder at something that I thought I had when I had to sit down and really think about it. So, it made me feel better about the effort I was putting in.

Jacquelyn worried about her role in coconstructing and reflected that taking the extra step in self-grading and directing her learning situated her focus on what she wanted out of the curriculum:

I was definitely intimidated about making a rubric. Because I’ve never really made one before. But I just drew on [previous] experience, [and] graded myself a little bit with a rubric. . . . Even though I was worried about starting, once I did, I actually really enjoyed making the rubric because it made me realize more what I wanted to accomplish in the assignment. As I was making categories of what I wanted to grade, I was like, oh, I actually want to do this, which I hadn’t even thought of. So, that was actually really helpful. So, even though it was new, of course, it was hard. I liked that. The actual grading, I think it went well. I mean, I was a little bit intimidated. I think maybe I’m cautious to grade myself well. But then I have to remind myself like, okay, if I really put in my best effort, I should



say that. So, I like how it wasn't just pick a letter grade, you also got to express your effort. And I think that's really nice. So, that kind of just shows like, maybe what you produce, maybe someone won't realize that's your best effort. But when you can talk about that, too, I think it really helps.

I have shared quotes from Parker, Sarah, Amadine, Robin, and Jacquelyn about positive experiences with choosing and note there were many student quotes about positive experiences with choice. Other students expressed needs from their instructors to best support this new approach to learning. Elise discussed needing feedback when having choices:

The things that I found less helpful really relates to just the course in general, a lot of things are really open ended. And they felt like I didn't get enough feedback from the instructor on what I could be working on better.

Elise wanted more interaction with her instructor when given choices so she could gauge her progress. Moe wanted on how choice impacted his learning, instead deferring to his instructor:

I don't think [having choices is] important to me; I could see where it's important to other students. But, I guess, I just, I like that. But I would trust that Dr. Roberts has an intent on how to learn things. So, I trust that.

Lizzie, conversely, wanted even more choices in the curriculum:

I think [having more choices] would just give me, or anyone in my position, a chance to know the right word and be able to take control in your own learning. To be able to be recognized by the professor that you want to excel.

Elise, Moe, and Lizzie shared experiences about how they trusted their instructors or wanted more interaction from their instructors when having choices.

It is important to note an experience that did not match others in the data. Scarlett felt having students self-grade without providing them with choices and higher levels of self-directed learning was unfair and more work:

When we're given clear, nonoptional material and format of the assignment, and then all of sudden, we're asked to grade it, and then add, like a blurb of, hey, how did you feel about that? What could you have done better? Or like, you know, or how can we improve this assignment? The future kind of verbal feedback, or that like a written feedback element? I feel like it's an element of cocreation, but only future-forward of how can we improve the assignment next time? It struck me a little bit of like, oh, really, like, you're almost asking students to do more work than they're already doing in a way.

Although Scarlett's feedback critiqued a self-grading approach without choices offered to students in the curriculum, she did ultimately want opportunities to self-grade—but only if provided more opportunities to make choices and self-direct her own learning pathway.

For some students, choices created opportunities to share their identities in their communities, an important construct of CSP. Lizzie shared about developing her language(s) and shared her learning process with family and friends:

You're making your own personal choices about which direction is going to help you both learn the language, learn the material, and also how to show your professor and people in that class that you understand what's going on. It also helps me direct a lot of different skills. Being able to have good study habits, apply them to the world. Talk about it with my family members or my friends. Just the control aspect, is huge. I think that's why I've done so well this term.

Jacquelyn shared the opportunity to choose allowed her to make choices she could share with others to express her identity in relatable ways:

When I realized I could pick any sort of digital artifact, it definitely made me feel way better because I would rather just play into my strengths in presenting. And I like to do oral presentations. Because if I always, for example, have to write an essay, that can really get me overly stressed. Because sometimes I don't want to take all the time to express my ideas in a very academic formal way, every single time, it's better when I can actually talk to them, talk to people, because I'd like to, in my private life, actually talk to people about what I'm learning. So, it's cool when I can make something that I can share with other people, since most people don't really want to read a long essay.

Similar to Jacquelyn, Enola and Sarah also shared experiences that having choices made learning relevant to their self-expression and career goals. Enola shared about including

more personal experiences into her learning and indicated choices provided her with the avenue to learn more through this form of connecting her personal experiences with course content:

I can put my more personal experiences in my writing, and not be a little held back, because I want to [pull], all the academic aspect out. And sometimes I keep back all the personal experience, or the personal, like, knowledge I've gained for myself. So with self-assessing myself, or self-grading, I could put more of that personal touch to it, and not be scared to be like, "Oh, well, this isn't very academic of me to put that in there." But with self-grading, I feel like it's been a little bit more helpful to include more of my personal experience in my writing, or in activities that I do in class.

Sarah described having choices as helpful, saying she got more out of the experience when she matched it to her own interests:

I think it's helpful because you can cater it more toward well, I can cater it more toward my own interests. There's so much information out there that I think it is important to narrow it down to what's actually useful. And what it makes learning a lot easier when the information is like, pertinent to what you're trying to do with your career or something that, like, personally, makes you feel away, or helps you. So I appreciate that aspect. Because I think I just get more out of it when I'm able to have options.

Students described needing choice to be an intentional instructional approach that must also include efforts to design for trust, community building, and engagement in the asynchronous curriculum. Without these key components, choice will not enhance learning. Parker shared how a course that had similar content as his current course but was taught as a correspondence course would not have been as interesting to him. Parker felt he was engaged and learned more as a result of instructor trust (flexibility to make his own choices and decisions) and his ability to connect with others in the course:

I mean, if it weren't for some structure to the courses that have been online, I'm just trying to imagine if, if it were in a different context where perhaps it wouldn't rely on like internet access; for example, if it was just a computer module, like learning program, I don't think that I would get as much out of it as, as having

another person on the other side. And yeah, even though it can feel a little removed and disjointed. I've had such a lovely time, and I'm engaged, I'm interested in what I'm learning. So, it's easy for me. The flexibility too of being able to work and get in these classes. Right now, just whenever I have time, or whenever I feel like my mind is better able to focus, you know? It's like having the freedom to choose the time that works best for my learning. Like my brain being in optimal operation mode is so priceless for me.

Scarlett had a different experience from Parker. She felt her course was designed with less interaction and community building, and as a result, she felt lost in not having anyone to process course content with:

I mean, in all honesty, having asynchronistic classes, it's me, my computer, my brain, deadlines, and, like, forced discussions forum being like the bulk of the engagement. And this is not news, you know, this is the format that's been around. And by, you know, a year-plus into online school, it's nothing new. But yeah, working with the material, I'd say completely on my own, like, the discussion formats, or forums are almost so shallow. And, like, forced that, I almost don't really feel even engaged with my peers on that level. And so very much this feels like I'm learning with myself in the computer. I have, you know, a, basically no relationship with my professor, I've, I didn't really feel like I have anyone to digest the material with or, like, have those raw, like, time, time relevant, like conversations and like, I end up having to process what I'm learning and with, like, you know, my partner who I live with, or like, maybe on the phone with a friend, because, like, some of the stuff we learn is, like, really intense and super heavy. And then, you know, just to be in my house, like, receiving that information with like, no real, like engagement to like, work on that and like, to chew on it with other students, like, it is really hard and isolating, you know.

Although Parker and Scarlett had different experiences, both students described needing trust from their instructors (e.g., flexibility), and both students described needing to feel part of a community in an asynchronous course to enhance their learning.

Students described choosing as a critical finding in delivering cocreative curricula. Earlier in the analysis, the research team identified when instructors added choices to the curriculum, not all students were ready nor able to engage. We determined how students made choices looked different depending on several elements related to

how instructors built trust with students, mainly flexibility, communication, personalization of the curriculum, and building community. Students confirmed the importance of several elements from our earlier analysis related to choice, including flexibility, communication and trust with their instructors, self-expression, and community building. Next, I discuss the element of a trusting student relationship and how it relates to enhanced learning.

### **Trusting Student–Instructor Relationship**

A trusting student–instructor relationship is a key element that contributes to a student’s ability to make choices in the asynchronous curriculum. Factors identified in this study that affected a trusting student–instructor relationship included flexibility and communication. Students identified flexibility as a key strategy instructors leveraged to demonstrate trust, which is also supported in existing literature on supporting student learning online (Kono & Taylor, 2021). Yo Yo said, “I think that [having choices and self-grading] kind of gave me . . . like I am also the one that’s in control, when I’m doing things. I have the flexibility to choose, not just what I’m learning, but when. That’s helped out a lot.” Amadine also shared how having flexibility was important to her as a learner:

If I were cocreating it, then the time it takes me to do it is important. And if I need another day to do it, then it’s very respectful and powerful to be given that autonomy to take another day to do something. So, the timing and flexibility in delivery and production scheduling, I find a very, very key part of my cocreating experience. I feel like I’m cocreating my education, they’re presenting the material and the pattern, but it should be me that decides if I need to take 10 days for Section 2 and only 5 [days] for Section 3 to work faster or slower, and so that’s very important to me.

Parker had previous experience with course materials, and having choices allowed him to expand his knowledge around new topics rather than reviewing content with which he was already familiar:

I really appreciated the flexibility with it. Because I was coming to it with a background that I had already kinda covered a lot of the material of the class, this was just kind of looking at it from a different perspective for me. And so rather than spending a lot of time covering the same material that I've covered before, it gave me the freedom to just use that and start expanding my own understanding and thinking around the topics.

I have shared quotes from Yo Yo, Amadine, and Parker about flexibility as samples of the many student quotes about flexibility in this study.

Another aspect students indicated is important to a trusting student–instructor relationship was communication, specifically clear guidelines, expectations, and feedback. Enola mentioned the need for clear expectations and guidelines when having choices in their learning, along with regular and substantive feedback:

Sometimes I will choose something that might be a little bit different to what I am used to, just to, like, you know, creatively think about something. And through self-assessment, it's helpful to hear back from [the instructor]. And it helps me learn a little bit better [or how] maybe I should do something differently.

Dakota shared how she wanted more feedback from her instructor, and Moe shared how he liked having feedback about connections he might have missed from the course material. Scarlett and Elise wanted more feedback on what they might have missed on their work from their instructors.

Students indicated they were best able to engage in coursework when they had built a trusting relationship with their instructors. Flexibility and communication from instructors, including clear expectations and feedback, were important to building this trust and aided in students entering into coconstructed asynchronous learning spaces.

## Engaging in Coursework

When students are involved, the likelihood of their engagement increases (Kuh, 2008; Tinto, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Students described several factors that impacted their engagement with coconstructed content. Time, access, and experience with course content and cocreation affected how students engaged in their online courses. Lizzie, Micah, Moe, and Parker discussed the power they felt in managing their own time, and Parker described this flexibility as freedom. Lizzie appreciated “being able to look at the slides and hear the lectures on my own time, and also to pause, replay, take notes, things like that, I found that really useful.” Robin described engaging with coconstruction as taking more time due to the extra level of engagement they had with the content. Robin said, “I wouldn’t [want to coconstruct and self-grade] for every assignment in the class. I think that’s putting way too much pressure on the student.”

Access impacted student engagement. Yo Yo shared about not having previous experience with technology and subsequent struggles. Yo Yo said, “I’m still adjusting to how technological everything is. I feel like I have a good handle on things, until I’m in it, until I’m turning something in really late and I’m like, oh my god, I don’t know how to do that.” Instructors noted coconstruction takes time to design and time for students to adjust, which related to stories shared by Elise and Lizzie about how this was the first time they had ever coconstructed anything in a class; moreover, this was Lizzie’s first time taking an online course. Jacquelyn experienced challenges related to accessing her digital course materials, noting, “I did all my readings online, which I like. I like not having to get a textbook, not just for money, but it’s really hard to order them on time.”

Experience related to balancing life priorities and bringing life experiences to the curriculum impacted student engagement with coconstruction. Amadine shared about her life commitments, including being a mother and how balancing multiple priorities had impacted how she engaged in the course. Yo Yo discussed bringing her lived experiences to “bring more humanity” to the science they learned, illustrating how she was able to use her personal experiences to engage with course materials.

One area of asynchronous learning that affected student engagement in coconstructing curriculum was community. Dakota shared self-grading without having a sense of community with her peers affected her engagement:

I don't know that [self-grading has] changed or influenced how I feel. Maybe I've engaged with the material or learned anything. It's tough because in this particular course, we don't meet and we don't have lectures, which has been very difficult for me. So, we really just read the material on our own and then do the assignment. So, in that way, sometimes I can feel competent, that I'm like, engaging with the material, and I understand how to utilize the information, but [to] do self-grading feels like, oh, I'd love another point of view.

An important component of coconstruction was building community with the instructor and other students in the course. Next, I share how students describe the importance of community in constructing curriculum.

### **Building Community**

Building community online is an important element to coconstructing curriculum as students described asynchronous learning as isolating and lonely. Yo Yo, Lizzie, Robin, Amadine, and Enola described discussions as a critical and foundational piece to building connections and community in online spaces, citing the ability to reflect on their words over time helped them in their learning. Amadine felt the online space allowed her to show up with her whole identity as someone juggling a lot of priorities in her life:



I felt like this term I had some personal challenges that made it very difficult to be perfectly on pace with my peers. And I felt like that was very accepted. And, so, [online group discussions] didn't force me to separate my student identity from my other identities as a mother, as a worker.

Lizzie shared how being part of a community by sharing and hearing new and different perspectives in her class were beneficial to her learning:

I think that I definitely learn when I do study and take exams, but also with the discussions. . . . It brings you into a different area of thinking about real life situations and how it's applicable, but also hearing other people's responses. And I think overall, the discussions allow for enough time to make a well thought-out discussion. So, it's just being able to actually have the time. I think it's hard in a timed setting to have enough time for both teaching material and talking about it, if that makes sense. So, the discussions are a really a big part of these online classes where you have a lot, you've got a week to think about whatever the prompt is, but also come up with a really meaningful answer that I've been excited to find that some people in my classes do respond [to] my discussion posts. And sometimes, I bring up ideas that they haven't thought of or vice versa. I see different ideas and respond. So, it's just another way to communicate and see different perspectives. I think that overall what the world lacks is just an understanding of different perspectives.

It is important to note not all students found online discussions engaging.

Jacquelyn, Dakota, and Sarah shared how they wanted more collaborative learning and that discussions were not all that collaborative in their courses. Elise was able to share about being bilingual in her asynchronous discussions yet felt she was not making as many connections as she would in an in-person discussion. Students indicated that reflecting helped to build community.

Yo Yo indicated having the time to reflect added to her experience in how she shared with others in the class:

I always try to take a step back before I dive into [discussions that are personal/vulnerable], because I do want [my participation] to be more of a reflection than thrown in with the assignment, if that makes sense. So, I do feel like that has added a lot into what I got to learn and what I got to share with others.

Dakota shared how reflecting on others perspectives helped aid in her perception of self-grading:

Grades are only one part of the experience that's been very interesting in COVID, and just like how stressful life is. It's like I care very much about maintaining my 4.0. But it's like, for who? No one in the world is going to be like, you know, what was your grade point average in undergrad? It's also kind of helped me because you know what, this is just one part of it, and am I really actually learning something or for me? It's important to have another point of view. So, it has helped. It's definitely giving me another perspective that like, you know, it's just a grade.

Lizzie leveraged reflection similarly to Dakota and commented on using her peers' comments to assess her learning progress. Yo Yo used reflection to engage and participate in the course community, and Dakota and Yo Yo used feedback with their peers to reflect on their learning processes. Enhanced learning for students included having choices in their learning, a trusting student–instructor relationship, engagement in their coursework, and community with their peers. Although students considered each of these elements as important to building toward an enhanced learning experience, not all students were able to engage in equal and equitable ways.

### **Taking Risks**

Risk affected the entire process of cocreation. Cocreation in the asynchronous environment meant taking risks for all. To engage in choices, students sought opportunities to connect with their peers and express their identities while assessing the cost of doing so—named in the analysis as *risk* or *risk-taking*. Student considerations in assessing risk included vulnerability, safety, and instructor perceptions, who ultimately decided their grades. Hattie, Lizzie, Elise, Jacquelyn, Moe, and Dakota worried about their respective instructors' perceptions of their choices and the ramifications if the

instructor did not approve. Yo Yo found discussions helpful, noting, “I do like discussion groups right now. Kind of the anonymity behind it, I feel like, I think I can share a lot more. So, I think that is really helpful, being able to disclose some of those things.” Moe reflected on learning about the format of the class after his instructor adopted self-grading as one way to provide choice for students. He said, “I even talked to Dr. Roberts about that before we even started the class because it was a little bit unnerving. Because it feels like, it’s like, am I being tricked? I’m supposed to grade myself? Hattie regulated her self-assessment based on a concern about the instructor’s perception of this process:

I’m always afraid that I’m being too lenient with myself or that the professor’s gonna look it over and be like, “Oh, well, of course, they gave themselves 10 out of 10 points on this.” So, I was looking at it last night. I’ve actually docked myself at least one point on every single thing that I’ve turned in, even if I really did do a good job, and I’m happy with myself. I’m like, “Oh, well, let’s just knock a point off here.”

Moe and Hattie expressed taking risks through worry and concern about self-grading, sharing they did not believe the option to self-grade was a serious offer, where Hattie even docked herself points out of the perception her instructor’s ideas of success would not align with her own.

When the research team considered the underlying reasons students worried about engaging in coconstructing their learning experiences, it was important to consider and deconstruct power constructs and student and instructor experiences with systemic oppression. We considered a history of oppression in higher educational spaces and how each instructor approached power dynamics within the curriculum; we learned risk must be assessed differently when considering race, gender, ability, and other social privileges. In post analysis discussions, Dr. Joy reminded me students of color continue to operate in

a system where they do not trust their instructors, especially when they rarely have instructors where they feel represented, and students of color may lack the confidence to participate or advocate for themselves. When educators and researchers evaluate how coconstruction happens in asynchronous learning environments, we must consider risk taking an ever-present element in our calculations.

### ***The Instructor Experience***

Instructors approached coconstruction differently. By sharing stories and connecting about their hesitations and reservations in coconstruction, instructors built connections and were empowered to take action in changing their courses to share power with students. Instructors with existing courses described the act of making changes to their curriculum as risky and described several challenges to this work, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In the following paragraphs, I share descriptions of how each instructor approached coconstruction for their course.

Dr. Joy designed a coconstructed sociology course on African conceptions of power on gender and sexuality as a case study on Sierra Leone with a student enrollment of about 20–30 students. There were two assigned textbooks. Students at the start of class would discuss course themes related to gender and sexuality and then collectively decide on outcomes and assignments to meet those outcomes structured on guiding questions, which were designed to build relationships. When Dr. Joy shared her plan with the research team and advisory committee, and indicated her syllabus was mostly open-ended to build critical course components with students. Dr. Joy chose a fully coconstructed course, similar to the whole-class approach to cocreation shared by Wymer and Fulford (2019) in the literature review. Unfortunately, after building her curriculum and

presenting to the research team, Dr. Joy learned her course was not approved in time and would not be offered in Fall 2021 as planned, and she was unable to teach this course as part of this study.

Patricia taught a coconstructed macroeconomics course with slightly more than 40 students enrolled. She opted for coconstructed curriculum that included a peer-graded and self-assessed grading rubric, along with a negotiated course curriculum where students could opt in to deciding the weight of course assignments. Students could opt in to only have course exams count toward their grade, or students could include homework and exercises for a more balanced grade. Students could weigh homework and exercises more heavily if they felt they wanted exams to count for less. In this way, students were able to make decisions about their grades and where they wanted to spend their time for this course. Patricia opted for a minimal-to-moderate coconstructed curriculum as students made decisions about the weight of course assignments—some even opting to not have exams or weekly homework assignments. Students were not able to submit alternative assignments or cocreate content with Patricia.

Teresa taught a coconstructed Speech and Hearing Sciences course of about 20–30 students. She built several coconstructed elements to her course, including self-grading rubrics, where students were invited to take on more control and encouraged to rewrite rubrics for their learning labs (i.e., weekly lab assignments) and self-assess these rubrics. Students were offered choices about how to work collaboratively throughout the course including individually, as partners, or in small groups. Teresa selected a minimal-to-moderate coconstructed curriculum. Students self-graded and were encouraged to take on more direction by rewriting these rubrics with their own criteria. Teresa's course was

a minimal-to-moderate coconstructed curriculum, as students were asked to create their own criteria for self-assessment; yet, they did not individually nor collectively create course content in partnership with Teresa.

Jennifer taught a community nutrition course with a slightly larger student population of just over 50 students. She chose a minimally coconstructed curriculum that highlighted student choices and offered structured opportunities for self-grading. Jennifer's course offered minimal coconstruction; students could choose the type of format to submit their assignments and could self-grade a weekly engagement activity. Students in this example did not cocreate assignments nor participate in cocreated decision making in the course.

Kim taught a world English course with a total of 20 undergraduate and graduate students. For her coconstructed curriculum, Kim focused on redesigning a section of her course that had previously consisted of three exams. The three exams were redesigned as a group independent project with two to three students per group. Students could propose their own ideas for how they wanted to meet course outcomes for the project, including self-grading. Kim chose a minimal coconstructed curriculum. She chose to increase choice on one assignment for students to self-direct their own learning; however, the course was mostly prescribed.

Instructors felt challenged in designing opportunities for coconstruction that upset existing curricular expectations. Expectations were noted as coming from colleagues and peers around what teaching "should" look like—not rooted in best or learned practices around online learning and teaching, but instead on power constructs where instructors have the power and students must learn from the expert (i.e., a deficit view of students as

learners). To combat historical exclusionary expectations and move to making curricular changes that shared power with students, instructors relied on a community of practice with other coresearchers from interdisciplinary backgrounds to (a) share their worries, (b) reflect as a cohort, and (c) engage in conversations to create curricular practices that centered culturally sustaining practices where students were positioned as experts of their lived experiences and assets to their own learning and the learning of other students in the course. In Chapter 5, I summarize the findings, share implications for practice based on the research team's collective analysis, link to themes from our conceptual framework, and note limitations and suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter I provide a summary of the findings presented in Chapter 4, synthesize the findings in terms of the conceptual framework for the study, discuss the significance of the findings, offer implications of the findings for practice and future research, and discuss the limitations of the study. Throughout chapter five I link findings with relevant literature, recent studies, and connect to themes from the conceptual framework.

### Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore student–instructor curriculum cocreation processes in the asynchronous online class environment. Our goals were to critically examine student-instructor relationships during the process of cocreating curriculum, to promote a change in current student roles in curricular decision making, and to build towards a student voice framework for asynchronous curriculum. To guide us in the interpretation of the data, this study was framed around the constructs of student voice work, radical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, which collectively address positionality, democratic classrooms, reflexivity, power, and participation.

The research team generated the following findings, organized around the four research questions.

1. What faculty perceptions, values, and challenges are present when transitioning to a coconstructed partnership model of learning that values culturally sustaining pedagogy?
  - Instructors perceived teaching coconstructed curriculum as risky due to being worried students would not support new approaches, being worried about doing it wrong, and due to time constraints.
  - Instructors valued connecting with their colleagues from interdisciplinary backgrounds as part of a community of practice.



- Instructors described several challenges to coconstructing curriculum for asynchronous learning. Instructors felt designing coconstruction for asynchronous learning was challenging, including needing new communication practices. Instructors described the time commitment to engage in coconstruction online as challenging, that they struggled to keep up with supporting students, and worried about how and when to intervene to best support students.
- 2. How does the process of engaging in PAR inform faculty perspectives on the distribution of power between students and faculty within a coconstructed curriculum?
  - Instructors perceived that sharing within a community of practice helped them to make changes to their curriculum and informed how they distributed power with their students.
  - Instructors described how an awareness of systemic power was important to how they distributed and shared power with students in the curriculum.
- 3. How do faculty describe the process and challenges of developing an asynchronous course to include components of culturally sustaining pedagogy, student coconstruction, and self-grading?
  - Instructors included some but not all aspects of culturally sustaining pedagogy in coconstructing curriculum with students.
  - Instructors found that offering choices for students did not always yield student feelings of agency.
  - Instructors found that providing self-grading or self-assessment opportunities was a component to coconstructing curriculum with students only when students also had choices to self-direct their learning.
- 4. How does the process of student-faculty course coconstruction unfold for students and faculty in an asynchronous learning environment?
  - Learning and teaching online require different approaches than in-person courses when coconstructing curriculum.
  - When students had choices to self-direct their learning, they were able to enhance their learning in asynchronous spaces. Choice alone did not create the conditions for students to exercise agency. Factors that affected how students made choices included a trusting student-instructor relationship, engagement in coursework, building community, intersected with an understanding that for many students, choosing involved taking risks.
  - Instructors approached coconstruction in asynchronous environments differently, from minimal amounts of choice, to moderate, to full coconstructed curriculum.

In summary, instructors experienced the collaborative group as a support that helped them to navigate the challenges of cocreation and to take varying levels of risk by

disrupting traditional instructor–student power dynamics and by offering students choices to self-direct and enhance their learning (which students took up to varying degrees).

### **Significance of Findings**

Theoretical frameworks are useful to help inform the work that we're doing, and we're passionate about th[is work]. But, I want to caution on remaining conscious of the power that we still have, the privilege that we still have, even if you say we're doing this work, that unconsciously we might still be reproducing those systems.

—Dr. Joy

I begin the section on the significance of our findings by sharing a quote from Dr. Joy who reminded us that although we chose to engage with three theoretical perspectives to guide us in this study, our individual power and privilege were also relevant and important.

In the literature review we identified several key elements from our three theoretical perspectives of student voice work, radical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Taken together, these themes were power, power struggle, democracy, positionality, coconstruction, mutual benefit for students and instructors, neoliberalism, resistance to monolingualism, and cultural and linguistic pluralism. This study contributed data to address the gap in research addressing student voice work, radical pedagogy, or culturally sustaining pedagogy within an asynchronous undergraduate curriculum. In this section, I discuss the findings relevant to each of the theoretical perspectives framing the study. Then, I discuss the ways in which our findings

address important gaps in the scholarly literature around the challenges involved in coconstruction and around coconstruction in asynchronous learning environments.

### ***Student Voice Work***

In this study, I defined student voice work as a shared decision-making process between students and instructors that harnessed the power of student's lived experiences and voices to create democratic classrooms; this involved choice and agency for students and aimed to be transformative for both students and instructors. For the purpose of this study, the definition of student voice work is theoretical, cocreation is the process for how we go about student voice work, and partnership is the intended outcome. Constructs from student voice work for this study included, power, power-sharing, positionality, coconstruction, and a mutually beneficial impact for students and instructors. Instructors in the study shared about the importance of having an awareness of their own power and how they distributed this power in their classrooms.

Although instructors were able to engage in deconstructing power and to begin the process of power-sharing in their curriculum, not all instructors shared power in the same ways. Dr. Joy designed an opportunity for students to create some (or all) of their experience in the curriculum. Patricia created opportunities for choice and agency for students to direct their learning, and Jennifer, Teresa, and Kim had different approaches to increasing student democracy in the classroom.

Instructors approached coconstruction differently and thereby positioned students differently. In the literature on student voice, Fielding (2001) described four levels of student involvement, starting with students positioned as a data source and increasing in agency. After students as a data source, the next position was students as active

respondents, then students as coresearchers, and finally students as researchers (Fielding, 2001). For the purpose of this study, I have adapted Fielding's table to fit the context of higher education, with our intended audience of undergraduate students in asynchronous curriculum. I adapted Fielding's table to represent data from this study of how instructors chose to approach coconstruction differently, thereby positioning students at different levels as a result.

I have created a visual representation of how three constructs, power, power-sharing, and positionality from the theorization of student voice unfolded in this study, adapted from Fielding's levels of student involvement table (Fielding, 2001; see Table 11). Language in Table 11 represents implications for future practice. I do not intend for the table on student voices in curricular partnerships table (see Table 11) to be a scale of quality for curriculum design. Some courses will best fit in one category, others, in another. My intention in creating this table was to provide a visual for the range of how curricular partnerships could be approached in curriculum. One element that is important to note that will add to the complexity of student voice in curricular partnerships is class size.

### **Students as a Data Source**

The students as a data source is an example of how instructors begin to build partnerships with students by listening to the student voice and then making changes to improve the student experience in the curriculum. Instructors hold the power in this example and listen to student voices to inform the curriculum; students do not contribute or make decisions in the curriculum. Although students as a data source includes inclusive teaching practices related to incorporating feedback from students, it also

reflects a bit of the transactional/deficit model of education (Freire, 1970) where instructors have the power and knowledge to disseminate to students. Examples of how instructors might include the student voice as an element of partnership for this example, is through the review of student experience surveys, course evaluations, holding a listening session with students, or reviewing summative feedback. Instructors use clear expectations and feedback as ways to support students positioned as a data source in the curriculum.

### **Students as Responders**

Several instructors from this study created their curriculum where students were positioned as responders. In the students as responders example, instructors extend the students as data source example to build partnerships with students by offering choices and increasing opportunities for students to self-direct their learning. Instructors designed opportunities for learning and trust building to be created through discussion; students could make minimal choices about their learning, such as what type of format they wanted to submit their assignment in (paper, video, presentation). The students as responders example provides students with some choices about how to respond to course structure provided by the instructor. Instructors support students by structuring learning with clear explanations, feedback, and offering flexibility related to choice and due dates.

### **Students as Cocreators**

The students as cocreators example extends on the students as a data source and students as responder examples. Students as cocreators is an example for instructors in building partnerships with students that offers students increasing opportunities to make choices about how they want to self-direct their learning. Two instructors from this study

chose different degrees of a cocreated curriculum. When students are positioned as cocreators, meaning is created in dialog with others in the class and includes sharing knowledge with family and within home communities. Students have options to participate in democratic decision-making and self-assessment, by creating their own grading rubrics, or negotiating course content and weights. Whereas with self-grading students fill out a predetermined rubric, self-assessment provides students with more choices to determine how they want to be evaluated. Instructors support students as cocreators by structuring learning with clear explanations, feedback, and flexibility along with course discussions that provide students with the opportunity to share about their lives, connect to the course materials, and build community.

### **Students as Creators**

The students as creators example builds partnerships with students by supporting student-led topics. Students are offered opportunities to initiate course topics (related to predetermined course outcomes and textbooks), participate in democratic decision-making, and self-assessment. Meaning is made through course dialog and in the process of sharing with others. Students are the learning initiators as compared with previous models where instructors initiate course content. Students as creators is a model that suggests a high amount of trust directed towards students as directors of their learning. Instructor supports for students in this example include flexibility, autonomy, building community through discussions, reflection, facilitating connections, and providing structure as needed.

I provide a visual map of each of the four student voice in curricular partnerships examples as a source to compare and contrast each example (see Table 11). The student

voice in curricular partnerships table (see Table 11) is significant as it illustrates findings from this study about how to build partnerships with students for educators in higher education within the context of online learning.

**Table 11**

*Student Voice in Curricular Partnerships*

| How positionality is addressed        | Students as a data source   | Students as responders  | Students as cocreators   | Students as creators   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Student—<br>instructor<br>interaction | Instructors<br>acknowledge<br>student voices  | Instructors listen<br>to student<br>voices  | Instructors listen<br>in order to<br>contribute to<br>coconstruction   | Instructors listen in<br>order learn from<br>students<br><br>Instructors support<br>student-led topics |
| How<br>meaning is<br>made             | Dissemination<br>Instructor ><br>Student  | Discussion  | Dialogue<br>(instructor<br>facilitated)<br><br>Sharing with<br>others  | Dialogue (student<br>led, instructor<br>supported)<br><br>Sharing with others                          |
| Student<br>positionality              | Recipients  | Responders  | Cocreators   | Initiators   |
| Power is<br>represented               | Instructors<br>hold<br>the power  | Students have<br>some choices   | Democratic<br>decision-making  | Democratic<br>decision- making   |
| How student<br>voice is<br>manifested | Surveys<br><br>Course<br>evaluations<br><br>Listening<br>sessions with<br>students<br><br>Summative<br>feedback | Choices in<br>project<br>submission<br>format<br><br>Choices within<br>content<br><br>Self-grading<br><br>Formative | Choices in<br>project topic,<br>format, group/<br>individual work<br><br>Self-<br>assessment<br><br>Negotiated<br>course graded<br>weights | Determine course<br>outcomes,<br>assignments, or<br>projects<br><br>Self-<br>assessment                |

| How<br>positionality<br>is addressed      | Students as a<br>data source  | Students as<br>responders  | Students as<br>cocreators  | Students as<br>creators   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
|   |   | feedback   |  |   |
| Example of<br>student voice<br>curriculum | Instructor<br>updates<br>curriculum<br>based on<br>institutional<br>surveys on<br>students'<br>experiences. | Students choose<br>the type of<br>format they<br>want to submit<br>their assignment<br>in and self-<br>grade according<br>to a<br>predetermined<br>rubric. | Students decide<br>what they want<br>to research and<br>how they want to<br>meet course<br>outcomes.<br>Students read<br>predetermined<br>texts, have<br>discussions, and<br>create a rubric<br>according to<br>their proposed<br>project and self-<br>assess their<br>work. | Students work<br>together as a class<br>to research a<br>topic/problem of<br>interest related to<br>the course<br>topic/outcomes.<br>The instructor<br>works to support<br>the class by<br>facilitating any<br>needed structure<br>and connections. |
| Teaching<br>supports                      | Clear<br>explanations<br><br>Feedback   | Previous<br>column +<br><br>Flexibility<br><br>Discussion<br><br>Reflection<br><br>Trust Building  | Previous<br>columns +<br><br>Intentional<br>culturally<br>sustaining<br>practice<br><br>Discussion<br><br>Reflection<br><br>Trust Building   | Previous columns +  |

*Note.* Adapted from “Students as Radical Agents of Change” by M. Fielding, *Journal of Educational Change*, 2, pp. 136–137. Copyright 2001 by Springer.

I wanted to rebuild Fielding’s (2001) student involvement table because during the course of this research I had quite a lot of interest from colleagues, faculty, and staff at PSU about cocreation and student-instructor partnerships. I found myself referencing



Fielding's table often in these meetings and sharing it at workshops and in discussions.

For our purposes, Fielding's table was a limited example from the scholarly literature because it referenced a K–12 study, was over twenty years old, was in-person, and took place within an educational context outside of the United States.

I want to call out the complexity and nuances of student voice in curricular partnerships including potentially competing paradigms between each example. Instructors who wish to adopt partnership with students may have to adopt a different paradigmatic worldview which could add to the complexity of adoption (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Heron & Reason, 1997). In chapter four, I shared how Kim referenced having to change her paradigmatic worldview as having to pop a different SIM card into her brain.

### ***Radical Pedagogy***

Radical pedagogy is an educational practice that centers student voices and pushes back against systems of inequities within education (Giroux, 1986; Taylor & Robinson, 2009) such as hidden curriculum and neoliberalism (Giroux, 2002; Museus & LePeau, 2020; Sweet, 1998). Constructs from radical pedagogy that guided coresearchers in this study included democracy, power, power-struggle, positionality, hidden curriculum, and neoliberal influences. Instructors identified an awareness of one's power and the distribution of power in the curriculum as central themes within this research. Although the hidden curriculum was not central in the data collected for this study, elements related to disrupting hidden curriculum, such as clear expectations and communication were noted in analysis. Neoliberalism was not specifically identified as a theme in the data. However, instructors did express worry, concern, and anxiety in

challenging expectations that disrupted concepts of individualism and in trying out distributed power models within the curriculum, a possible indicator of the hidden influence of neoliberalism within higher education.

Instructors embraced constructs from radical pedagogy including democratic decision-making, creating alternative grading practices, sharing power, and centering dialog. One significant implication I generated through interpreting the data with a radical pedagogical lens is the importance of explaining to students how and why a curriculum is created. We know students have increased academic confidence when instructors are transparent and explain how an online curriculum was created and the purpose of course activities (Kumar et al., 2019). Students who participate in a coconstructed curricular process will need communication about how to engage in the coconstruction process. Instructors should include the instructional strategies that went into creating the curriculum and why it was designed in the way it was. Findings from this study contribute to the limited scholarship on radical pedagogy and student partnerships within online learning.

### ***Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy***

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is an intentional practice where an instructor creates avenues and pathways for cultural pluralism within the curriculum (Kono & Taylor, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017). Instructors in this study applied several inclusive practices from culturally sustaining pedagogy, but not all. Instructors explicitly discussed approaches to teaching that reflected culturally relevant pedagogy such as framing students' lived experiences as assets, viewing knowledge construction as a shared process, resisting deficit framings of students, and building opportunities for

students to include their lived experiences in the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Instructors explicitly discussed elements of culturally responsive teaching such as building opportunities for student agency and empowerment in the curriculum, and being dedicated to student achievement (Gay, 2013; Hammond, 2016). Instructors in this study approached their teaching not by delineating one pedagogy (culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining) over another, but instead blended all approaches.

Instructors engaged in culturally sustaining pedagogy by attempting to shift power in their curriculum by coconstructing curriculum with students. Instructors did not address decentering whiteness, resisting monolingualism, or affirming and sustaining cultural and linguistic pluralism, in the data, however, this does not indicate these elements were not present within their teaching practice.

Operationalizing CSP is nuanced and evolving and will not look the same for every instructor, curriculum, or group of students (Paris & Alim, 2017). Additionally, well intended attempts to apply culturally sustaining practices, when not handled well, can exacerbate inequities (Puzio et al., 2017). Findings from this study suggest one way for instructors to engage in a culturally sustaining practice is by coconstructing curriculum with students. Cocreating curriculum is an intentional teaching practice in which an instructor distributes power to students, represents students in curriculum through the incorporation of student voice, and attends responsively to student positionalities. In these ways, coconstructing curriculum can be a culturally sustaining pedagogical practice (Mendoza, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017).

### ***Instructor Reported Challenges***

One limitation in the scholarly literature on student–instructor partnerships is an underreporting of challenges (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Findings from this study identified five challenges to coconstructing curriculum with students in asynchronous learning environments. The first and second challenges were that the nature of the asynchronous environment required new teaching approaches to build trust, community, and engagement that left instructors worried about the time investment and commitment it would take to really do this work well. The third challenge was keeping up with new teaching strategies and practices, such as new modes of communication, and extra time to provide more personalized feedback to students. The fourth challenge was determining how and when to intervene in the curriculum when sharing power with students. The fifth challenge was that providing opportunities for choice did not always yield student feelings of agency. This research contributes to the scholarly literature by offering these five challenges for educators and administrators to consider and address when engaging in student–instructor partnerships for online learning.

### ***Coconstruction with Students in Asynchronous Learning Environments***

I began writing this dissertation in 2018. At that time, I often heard hesitation about online learning from other educators, friends, and family. Many have now begrudgingly accepted that we may occasionally need online learning as a result of the pandemic. While online learning may not be one’s preference for learning or teaching, the pandemic forced people across the world into online learning formats, which subsequently forced a global acknowledgement of the importance of equitable and inclusive strategies for online learning contexts. As more and more students enroll in

online learning (Mead et al., 2020; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021), educators, researchers, and students need curricula that are representative and responsive to student voices. Beyond shielding students and faculty from contagious viruses, online learning formats can offer students increased flexibility and access.

Four instructors in this study had previously taught online courses and one was new to asynchronous teaching. This is important because some instructors came with previous experience and confidence in teaching online, which have been associated with an improved student experience in online learning (Mead et al., 2020; Wingo et al., 2017). A finding from this study was that the asynchronous learning environment required different types of communication and support for students, and therefore coconstruction for online learning needed different approaches than in-person curriculum. There is ample scholarly literature comparing online learning to in-person learning that supports the notion that teaching online needs different practices from in-person learning (Garrison et al., 2000; Hurlburt, 2018; Kaupp, 2012, Mead et al., 2020). For example, Mead et al. (2020) compared student course grades in a fully online biology degree program and found students had lower grades in the online versions of the course compared with the same versions of the in-person course. The grade disparity between students in online versus in-person learning is an indication that instruction needs to be different for the online versions of the course to best support students. Another point to consider is that online learning has the potential to leverage technological tools for communication and collaboration that are different from in-person learning such as discussion boards that allow all students to comment, reply, upvote, and favorite posts (Pee, 2019).

I wanted to place our finding about online partnership building needing different practices from in-person coconstruction in the literature, however this area of scholarship is very emergent with less than a handful of articles to reference. Emerging scholarship on student-instructor partnerships for online learning indicates a heightened importance of the student-instructor relationship as a collaborative partnership (Curtin & Sarju, 2021; Ouyang, et al., 2020). A collaborative partnership is “conceptualized as a shared, progressive, synergistic” process between both the students and instructor to constructively build and share knowledge, design the course, and create shared goals (Ouyang, et al., 2020, p. 200). Arguably, strengthening the student-instructor relationship for partnerships should be a goal for all learning contexts. While there are very few examples of undergraduate online student-instructor partnerships, I did find a study by Pee (2019) that broke cocreation into problem solving areas of focus and found decision cocreation (participants are empowered to make important decisions through online voting) and solution sharing increased cognitive learning, and decision cocreation also enhanced epistemic learning.

Similar to the review of the literature on online student-instructor partnerships, relationships were also important to instructors in this study, who were dedicated to building trusting relationships with students through communication and flexibility. Elements of relationship building and sharing are represented in the students as cocreators model in the student voice in curricular partnerships table (see Table 11). Table 11 represents a dissemination of the fluctuation of how instructors in this study positioned students in curriculum and is a clear and synthesized visualization of the varying examples of student partnership positions in curriculum. Instructors can use the

table (see Table 11) to help them make strides towards positioning students as cocreators of curriculum and engaging students in self-directed learning. While not an exact replication of instructional practice, it can serve as a guide to getting started with coconstructing curriculum with students.

### **Implications of the Findings for Practice**

The undergraduate curriculum should be representative of all students. One way instructors can increase representation and responsiveness to student voices is by coconstructing curriculum with students. I put forward three central implications for practice that contribute to the scholarly literature on student voice, radical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy in coconstructing partnerships with students for online learning. The first implication is for instructors, faculty, and educators to engage as part of a community of practice to support their efforts at coconstruction with students. The second central implication is the cocreation equation, a theoretical model for educators to use as a guide when building coconstructed curricula for asynchronous curriculum. The third implication is a set of recommendations for curriculum design including cocreation as a practice to increase equity.

As I put forward a call to educators to explore and implement coconstructed curriculum with students, I acknowledge this research is emerging and future studies will need to build on these initial findings. Findings from this research will not accommodate all modalities and teaching experiences. After sharing the three implications for practice, I offer cautions learned from our review of the literature and informed by data in this study.

### *Community of Practice for Online Partnerships*

Findings from this study suggested that instructors who engaged in coconstruction as praxis benefited from connecting with other instructors from interdisciplinary backgrounds in a community of practice. Communities of practice have long been supported as a way to enhance faculty development in higher education (Delany-Barmann & McIlaine-Newsad, 2022; Reilly, et al., 2012; Sherer et al., 2003). Instructors learned from each other by sharing stories and having a space to challenge themselves in sharing power and making changes to their curriculum. A supportive community of practice has implications for academic development teams at colleges and universities that support instructors in professional development and want to begin engaging in student voice curricular partnerships with their instructors and faculty.

I recommend to begin with a worksheet similar to my adaptation of Fielding's (2001) *Evaluating the conditions of student voice* (see Appendix L) to help instructors reflect on power dynamics in their courses and practice sharing and listening in discussion. Another helpful practice is an interview exercise where group members interview people in their lives about their favorite and least favorite educational experiences to practice honoring oral histories and as an exercise in listening. Together these exercises ground the practice of transitioning to a coconstructed curriculum in reflexivity, discussion, and listening - each an important aspect needed to make changes to democratize online classrooms and to share power.

Communities of practice for instructor professional development could include elements modeled after PAR. PAR challenges traditional approaches to research by involving participants as co-researchers to take action and advocate for change (Guishard,



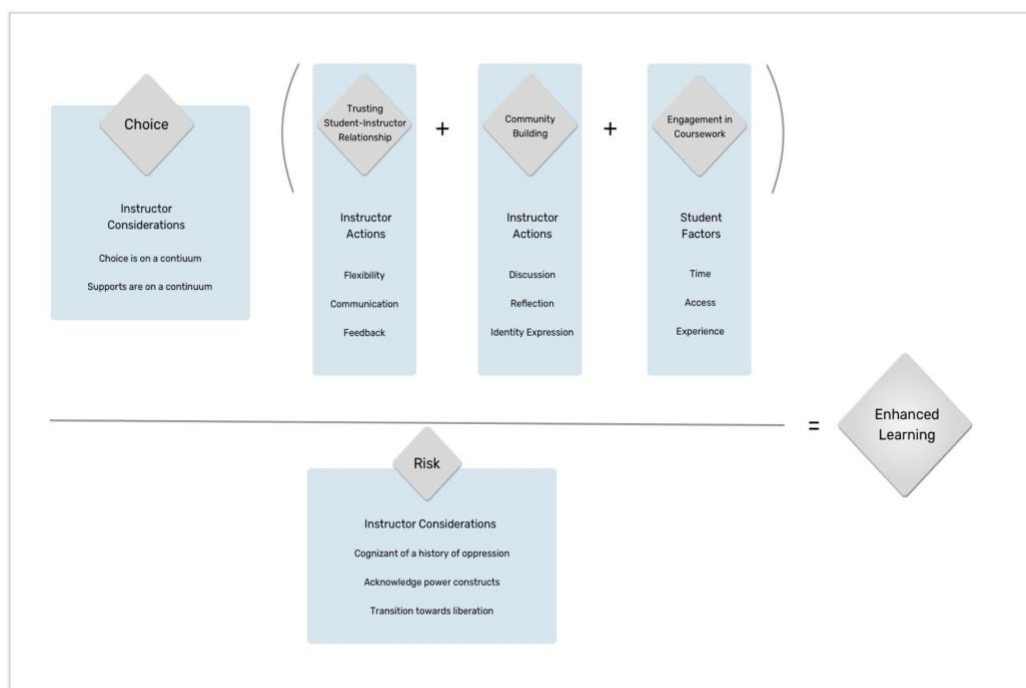
2009; Herr & Anderson, 2015). This PAR team took action to make changes to their curriculum and committed to being leaders in calling for a more equitable and inclusive curriculum for online learning. Action for us was the investigation of our internal positionality and power within academia, regular participation throughout the study, discussion with colleagues to promote sharing power with students, presentations to other colleagues, conference presentations, and discussions about publishing. Colleges, universities, and academic departments should create and fund communities of practice for instructors to design coconstructed curricula in order to disrupt hidden curriculum that deters students from persisting in their education and to center equity for students in online courses. To offer additional flexibility for participants, communities of practice can be offered virtually. By structuring communities of practice after PAR, participants will be encouraged and supported to make changes to their curriculum and collaboratively work through challenges.

### ***Cocreation Equation***

Findings from this study indicated an instructional process for how coconstructing curriculum with students enhanced their learning. To meet one of the goals of this study to offer a framework to guide future practice, I have built a theoretical model informed by findings from this study. The cocreation equation (see Figure 2) is a model for instructors and educators to support transitioning to coconstructed curriculum within online learning environments. It is important to note that student and instructor experiences from this study informed this model, however students themselves have not had the opportunity to contribute to and critique this model. Instructor coresearchers have affirmed and validated this model.

**Figure 2**

*Cocreation Equation: Building Coconstructed Student–Instructor Partnerships in Online Learning*



The cocreation equation is a visual metaphor for guiding educators through the process of building coconstructed partnerships in online curriculum. In the equation, enhanced learning is achieved when choice is multiplied by the sum of the parenthesis (trusting student-instructor relationship, community building, and engagement in coursework), divided by risk. In the equation, if choice = 0, enhanced learning = 0. Individual elements within the parenthesis can be zero, although a valuation of zero would limit or reduce the overall value of the equation. If the sum of the parenthesis is zero, enhanced learning would be equal or near to zero.

As a denominator, risk divides the entire process. The denominator of risk denotes the worry and concern students described in engaging in this work that was described in Chapter 4. It is important to note that communities who have been historically excluded in education such as Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Students of Color potentially have higher risk when engaging in coconstruction due to a history of exclusion within academic systems. Choosing may pose a risk for some students, and as a result, students may not make choices in line with the liberating intentions of choice as an equitable curricular practice (Ellsworth, 1989).

Risk as a denominator does not intend to assign a numerical value to the lived experiences of students who experience oppression within higher education. Instead, risk serves to amplify the voices of students in this study who expressed worry and concern about engaging in a shared power model. The placement of risk as a denominator is a reminder to all who seek to utilize the cocreation equation that although this work serves to disrupt inequities, we are still operating within the confines of exclusionary practices. Disrupting exclusion that has become normalized after centuries of repetition (Cohen & Kisker, 2009; Rudolph, 1977) can be risky.

Data from this study indicated that instructors approached cocreation differently and that offering choices for students fluctuated. To illustrate this fluctuation, I had mapped choice to a continuum with no choice on one end, markers for minimal and moderate coconstruction and coconstructed curriculum on the other end. Depending on the amount of choice provided to students, instructors may need different supports or teaching practices for students.

Students specified flexibility, communication, and feedback were factors that contributed to a trusting student-instructor relationship. When designing curriculum as cocreated with students, instructors can build trust with students by offering flexibility, communicating clear expectations and guidelines and providing regular feedback. Students in the data indicated that their learning was enhanced through community building, which aided in how they made choices. Factors that contributed to community building for students included the opportunity to have meaningful discussions with their peers, to be able to reflect on comments and shared stories from others and to have spaces where they felt comfortable to share about their identities and connect it to course materials. Students wanted the opportunity to build community by sharing about their lives with others in the class. Recommendations for practice are to build weekly discussions that are meaningful by including prompts for students to connect the course material to their lives through sharing and reflection.

When students were engaged in their coursework they felt more connected to building community and more involved in making choices that helped them to learn. Several factors affected how students engaged in their asynchronous curriculum including time, access, and previous experience with technology and course material. In this study, time was represented when students felt more engaged when they could participate in the class on their own time and balance course materials and interactions with other life priorities such as work, other classes, and family. Access in this study affected a student's engagement based on if a student had previous experience with learning technologies and had previously taken online courses. Other considerations for access include aspects of the digital divide such as access to quiet spaces for digital

learning, access to regular and fast internet, and access to a reliable computer to do coursework. Experience is the final factor that had an impact on how a student was engaged in course materials, made choices, and enhanced their learning. Experience showed up in the data when students had previous experiences with the course material and were more engaged when they had the flexibility to make their own choices and self-direct their own learning.

The cocreation equation is a theoretical model and visual metaphor to inform how educators navigate challenges and build enhanced learning opportunities for students in online learning curricula. In addition to the theoretical model of the cocreation equation, I also offer recommendations for curriculum design based on findings from this study.

### ***Recommendations for Curriculum Design***

Based on the cocreation equation, choice is important for learning in asynchronous courses. Choice mapped as a continuum revealed a nuanced practice for understanding how much or how little choice to provide for students. The amount of choice and how choice is supported by the instructor are dependent on strong communication including clear expectations, regular feedback, and examples from the instructor. A recommended practice is to include students in the design of the curriculum, however this option may not always be available. Additional factors to consider when deciding how much choice to provide may be dependent on how many students are in the class and how the instructor allocates time to building trust, community, and engagement in the course. Instructors will most likely need to adjust choices in the curriculum and offer flexibility as every student will have different needs and will approach choosing differently based on a myriad of factors.

A highly important part of choice is self-grading or self-assessment. Analysis indicated that being empowered with self-grading was an important part of how students stayed engaged with the course materials and without choices and the opportunity to self-grade, some students struggled to find the value in the practice of self-grading. Educators interested in adopting self-grading to encourage higher levels of self-directed learning for students must also build in opportunities for choosing and should attempt to engage with all supportive elements within the cocreation equation.

### **Cocreation as a Practice for Increasing Equity**

Involvement matters. The greater students' involvement...the greater the likelihood that they will persist.

—(Tinto, 1997, p. 600)

Data from this study suggested that cocreation can be adopted as a practice to center equity and inclusion in curriculum design. Recommendations for instructors who wish to adopt cocreation are to engage with a community of practice in a process that centers an understanding of one's power, builds opportunities for choice, trust, community, and engagement, in the curriculum. The role of the instructor then, is to guide students from repetitive independent (rote learning) practices towards higher levels of self-directed learning (Grow, 1991). When engaging with cocreation as a culturally sustaining practice, instructors should bring an intention to interpreting how the constructs of culturally sustaining pedagogy show up in their curricula, including a shifting culture of power, decentering whiteness, a mutually beneficial process, resisting monolingualism, and how instructors support, affirm, and sustain student's connections to their communities, languages, and cultures.

Departments and programs that house online undergraduate degrees should explore and adopt cocreation as a pedagogical practice for curricula to better align their programs with equitable and culturally sustaining teaching practices and to address student representation, retention, and persistence. It is important for departments and programs to expand cocreation beyond individual courses as it will offer students to expand their knowledge and contributions beyond a single course. Students may feel stress if they only experience the opportunity to coconstruct curriculum in one class and then return back to course formats where they have no or limited choices. Implications for colleges and universities are to adopt cocreative curricula at the programmatic level and engage instructors in communities of practice to determine approaches and practices to fit their individual disciplines.

### **Reverberation**

One possible outcome of increasing democracy and power for students is the concern that students will echo exclusionary practices such as wanting the instructor to tell them what to do or to exercise their voice(s) to further inequity in the classroom. The idea of a student leaning into their knowledge of navigating an inequitable system and to use their voice and power for individual success (while others remain in harm's way) may be considered either a highly privileged response or a fear of freedom response (Freire, 1970). Students who are accustomed to a high amount of privilege may feel distressed in a classroom environment that decenters whiteness, shares power, and affirms a diversity of lived experiences.

When we consider the fear of freedom (Freire, 1970) within student voice work, I do not intend to say all students are oppressed simply by their status as students. My

intention is to call out centuries of inequitable practices and policies that have conditioned students to hold certain expectations of power and pathways to success in a classroom. It is important to acknowledge that at times, repositioning students as cocreators may put additional stress or harm on them, especially if practitioners do not heed cautions outlined from this research. Implications for instructors in addressing reverberation as described includes decolonizing the course syllabus, sharing with students how the curriculum was created, and creating a structure for students to inform the syllabus either individually or collectively for the course. Instructors should consider working within a community of practice to share, work through, and address concerns associated with reverberation.

### **Cautions**

Although cocreation is a practice rooted in equity and liberation, it is important to note it may also be coopted and instead reinforce the very inequities it attempts to disrupt. An example of cooption includes providing choice without a continuous process to build trust, community, and engagement with students. An instructor coopting coconstructed curriculum would dismiss a consideration of risk for those involved, they would not have an awareness of their own power, would not review or consider a history of oppression for various students, and would not in actuality share power with students, but instead reinforce their own existing power structure.

The curricular cocreation equation is not a practice of equilibrium, homeostasis, or equality for students, instructors, or faculty—it is a disruptive process aimed at equity for student learning. It provides a structure to recognize one's own power and attempts to redistribute it, it challenges hidden curricular expectations, and provides pathways to



upset higher education directives that place instructors and faculty in power over students. This process of disruption presents risks to those who engage with it that should be considered in the design process of cocreating curriculum. In my work to support instructors in their teaching, I know it can be tempting to ask for a list of exactly what to do and what not to do. I caution that cocreating curriculum is not always a straightforward list of objectives to check off a list, instead it is nuanced and will require individual adaptation.

### **Limitations**

Data from this study addressed a concern that the undergraduate curriculum was not representative of all students. Findings addressed a gap in research about culturally sustaining pedagogies in asynchronous learning environments and suggested actionable guidance for equitable curriculum design and professional development for instructors. Often when qualitative research intersects with praxis, there are questions about generalizability. This study is not generalizable and only reflected data for courses with less than 50 students. A limitation of this study is that the cocreation equation may not apply to large lecture courses or courses with more than 50 students or courses in hard sciences or mathematics. Additionally, if this research had been conducted at another institution such as a Historically Black College or University, the data might have been different. Specifically components to support the cocreation equation, such as trust building and risk, might have shown up differently. Another institution might have had different levels of established trust or higher levels of risk for participant coresearchers and students, which would have affected the data and findings for this research.

Similarly, there may be limitations to the transferability of the findings due to the pandemic context for the study. Student engagement could look very different outside the context of a pandemic that put undue stress on both students and instructors. Another idea to consider is that some of the instructor coresearchers were only teaching online due to the pandemic, so they and their courses might have some important differences from instructors and courses taught online regardless of pandemic restrictions. A future study could investigate the process of coconstruction among seasoned online course instructors.

Another limitation related to the context of the pandemic was that it created an undue amount of stress for all members of the research team related to availability and time. Due to additional stress, instructor coresearchers had little ability to find quiet time for reflection related to this research. As a result, coresearchers adapted to an active reflective process centered on sharing and vulnerability within group meeting times. As a result, reflection was an important part of the process of our group meetings, which highly informed our PAR processes and findings.

Another limitation is that in order to study cocreation, the research team had to create the conditions that needed to be studied, potentially limiting understanding of the problem. If, prior to this research, cocreation had been more widely adopted, coresearchers might have included students; however in order to build curriculum, the research team met over a series of four quarters, a longer time commitment than students would be expected to make.

### **Recommendations For Future Research**

Researchers who want to study cocreation and extend on this research will collaborate more closely with students. Although findings highlighted differences in the

students' and instructors' experiences, researchers may instead seek to find patterns and similarities between the student and instructor experiences so cocreation might continue to be elevated as an equity practice. I highly recommend future research to include student participation in reviewing the cocreation equation and subsequent applications of student-instructor partnerships within online learning.

Researchers may consider adopting the conceptual framework proposed by de Bie et al. (2021) which interprets epistemic, affective, and ontological violence experienced by students and draws on student voices in this interpretation. By naming potential injustices, researchers may collaborate to take action by illustrating hidden or normalized practices and promote change. Future research about equity in curriculum will extend on elements of culturally sustaining pedagogy in all learning contexts and specifically within coconstructed curriculum.

My hope is that colleges and universities begin to implement coconstruction as an equity practice in all undergraduate curriculum. As coconstructed partnerships expand, researchers should continue to learn and inform equity practices within curricula.

## **Conclusions**

From 2018–2022, while conducting this research, I worked full time as a UX (user experience) designer at the Office of Academic Innovation (OAI) at Portland State University. I was able to apply aspects from this research to my practice as a designer. I began informing my own practice by initiating a student voices project for the colleagues in my office, which included scheduling student panels and sharing data from student surveys that had been distributed and disseminated at PSU. I worked to expand how students were positioned in our projects and began working with several students to

review online courses and provide them with feedback about the student experience. The student team members, myself, and another colleague, then created a more formalized process for student-centered course reviews to be offered as a service for any instructor who requested it at PSU. This service is now completely student-led with only occasional support by the user experience team at OAI. It is the first and only student-led service OAI offers as of 2022.

In Summer 2020 I was asked to lead the user experience of a campus-wide software transition from one learning management system to another. I agreed as long as I could co-lead with a student. I spent a year and a half co-leading a user experience team related to this software migration with an undergraduate student. Together, this student co-lead, myself, and six team members were able to make strides towards greater equity, accessibility, and usability within the migration process and were able to elevate inclusive design principles that affect the student experience in nearly ten different educational technology software products supported by OAI.

My work continued through the pandemic in promoting partnerships with students. As a result of the amount of interest I received to participate in this study, I partnered with a student who worked at OAI to design a two-part curriculum series in the Fall 2021 for anyone who was interested in learning more about cocreation at PSU. Finally, as of the writing of this dissertation, I am so proud to share that OAI has built student voice and user experience work into its strategic goals as a demonstration for how it is serving PSU's strategic priorities regarding student success. I dream of PSU being a Black, Brown, and Indigenous People of Color serving and student-led campus. I

encourage educators inspired by this work to join me in calling for communities of practice for instructors to design cocreated curriculum with their students.

In some small way I began the groundwork for this research all those years ago in choosing to move away from classes that were in large lecture halls or courses that only offered multiple choice exams. It also may have started much earlier when I was only just beginning my artistic career. My dad loves to tell the story that when as a kindergartner I was very proud of a drawing where I had scribbled all over the page and my teacher had instructed me I had to try again—I should have only colored within the lines. My dad (a foundation professor of art) marched down to proclaim to this teacher, “Who made the rules about art? Who says she should only color in the lines?” That day I learned that there is no wrong way to learn. What became a teachable moment for him at the time (arguably for me and my kindergarten teacher as well), set the stage for me later in life to explore my identity as an artist, student, and scholar. Questioning the forbidden “lines” led me to this research.

As an artist, having the choice in how to represent my thinking means everything to me. As an educator, I am proud of our collective work on this research. Proud to construct choice as a pedagogical practice that affirms students' various ways of knowing and experiences as assets. I am proud to offer constructive actions instructors can take to build more inclusive and equitable curricula in asynchronous learning environments. I am proud to challenge existing inequities in the curriculum, proud to do this work alongside incredible women who stayed with me for a year (and a pandemic year nonetheless). I am proud to call for these changes so students will not only see themselves represented in the curricula, but will have a voice in how they choose to direct their learning. I am proud to

call out to all educators, designers, artists, and learners to join me in a revolution of coconspiring, and that often our greatest learning moments happen when we color outside the lines.

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## **Appendix A: Invitation Email to Informed Consent Letter to Faculty at PSU**

PSU Faculty Needed!!

Participatory Action Research

“Radical (re)positioning of students as cocreators of curriculum;  
an exploration of undergraduate student–faculty partnerships in online learning environments”

Kari Goin Kono, doctoral candidate at Portland State University is seeking several faculty members to collaborate in creating a framework for students to coconstruct curriculum with faculty in online learning environments for undergraduates. This is a research opportunity that holds potential for any faculty who participates to publish findings related to a new framework for online learning to increase representation and responsiveness of student voice.

You are invited to collaborate in this study that aims to explore student and faculty coconstruction in online learning environments. Because of social distancing requirements, all collaboration will be conducted using Zoom meeting software. There will be seven collaborative meetings with other faculty participants.

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the student–instructor relationship during the process of cocreating curriculum and highlight the importance of student positionality in curricula decision making within asynchronous online learning courses. If you are interested in participating, please fill out the attached google form so that the researcher can contact you. If you have questions that you would like to ask before deciding to participate, please email:

Kari Goin Kono - xxxxx@pdx.edu; XXX-XXX-XXXX

To be eligible for this study:

- Employed as adjunct or full-time faculty at Portland State University for the Spring 2021 and Summer 2021 or Fall 2021 quarters.
- Must be teaching a fully online and asynchronous class for either Summer 2021 or Fall 2021.

## Appendix B: Faculty Consent to Participate

### Consent to Participate in Research

**Project Title:** Radical (re)positioning of students as cocreators of curriculum; An exploration of undergraduate student–faculty partnerships in online learning environments

**Population:** Adults, Participatory Action Research, Interviews, Researcher Memos

**Sponsor:** Dr. Dot McElhone

**Researcher:** Kari Goin, College of Education  
Portland State University

**Researcher Contact:** xxxxx@pdx.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The box highlights key information about this research for you to consider when making a decision whether to participate. Carefully review the information provided on this form. Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide to participate.

| Key Information for You to Consider   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Voluntary Consent.</b> You are being asked to volunteer for a participatory action research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.</li> <li>• <b>Purpose.</b> The purpose of this research is to empower coresearchers in the exploration of the process of students and faculty partnering to co-design curriculum in an online format. Goals are to identify challenges, benefits, and highlight transformational outcomes.</li> <li>• <b>Duration.</b> It is expected that your participation will last from Spring 2021–Winter 2022 quarters.</li> <li>• <b>Procedures and Activities.</b> You will participate with other faculty at PSU and myself (academic staff) in an exploration of online curriculum that is coconstructed with students. You will take memos or notes of your experiences throughout the process and consent to an interview in the term you teach your online class. This research is participatory and as such indicates you are a co-researcher who informs the study's research questions, data collection methods, and participates in analysis of the data.</li> <li>• <b>Risks.</b> Some of the foreseeable risks or discomforts of your participation include: faculty may be uncomfortable with their researcher memos or</li> </ul> |

interview transcripts being read by their peers and wish to have them withdrawn from analysis. At any point, faculty may ask to have their researcher memos and interview transcripts withdrawn from analysis. Faculty may experience discomfort participating with others on their curriculum during this study. To address this possibility, I have formed an advisory committee that is a neutral group who can advise on curriculum questions and concerns.

- **Benefits.** Faculty may feel empowered to participate in the writing of this study as part of a participatory action research methodology. This may have a potential impact on their research agenda by providing a coconstructed researcher experience within the university.
- **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

### **Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of this study is to explore student–faculty curriculum cocreation in the asynchronous online class environment. A goal of this work is to critically examine student–teacher relationships during the process of cocreating curriculum and promote a change in current student positionality in curricular decision making. This study engages in a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to generate new knowledge surrounding community needs by sharing power, engaging in collaborative decision making, and collectively analyzing data to determine findings (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Lykes et al., 2018). Specific to the context of online learning, the pandemic has prompted the need for participatory and collaborative solutions to direct this research to align with understandings of why undergraduate curriculum is not representative of all students.

You are being asked to participate in this study as a co-researcher. About 12–60 people will take part in this research including researchers, advisory team members, and student participants.

### **How long will I be in this research?**

This research will take place in three phases: Spring 2021: PAR Procedures and Course Development, Phase 2: Summer 2021 or Fall 2021 Course Implementation and Data Collection, and Phase 3: Collaborative Analysis and Action in Winter 2022.

### **What happens if I agree to participate?**

If you agree to participate in this research, your participation will include bimonthly meetings in Spring 2021 for a total of six meetings, one meeting in phase two or Summer/Fall 2021 and one meeting in Winter 2022. This research is participatory and you will participate by informing this study’s research questions, methods, data collection, and analysis which will include taking researcher memos, consent to being interviewed, and performing interviews.

### **What happens to the information collected?**

Information collected for this research will be used to inform our understanding of coconstruction in online environments and will inform a students-as-partners framework for online learning that will be sent out for potential publications related to the scholarship of students-as-partners in higher education.

### **How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?**

I will take measures to protect your privacy. Steps taken include providing all participants a pseudonym in writings about the study and privacy protection in access restricted online file storage for data collected in this pilot. Despite taking these steps to protect your privacy, I can never fully guarantee that your privacy will be protected. In a participatory action research study, you will collaborate with other coresearchers who will know your identity in this research.

Individuals and organizations that conduct or monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect research records. This may include private information. These individuals and organizations include the Institutional Review Board that reviewed this research and the study sponsor, Dr. Dot McElhone, tenured faculty in the College of Education at Portland State University.

### **What are my responsibilities if I choose to participate?**

Participation in this study relies on all coresearchers to attend the bimonthly meetings, participate in evaluating the research study design including research questions, data collection methods, and analysis. Participation indicates you are opting in to be a researcher and will conduct interviews of other faculty coresearchers in this study, students, and analyze and code data.

### **What if I want to stop participating in this research?**

Your participation in the pilot is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you may stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from participation at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or Portland State University.

### **Will I be paid for participating in this research?**

Participants will not be paid for participating in this research – participation is voluntary.

### **Who can answer my questions about this research?**



If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research related injury, contact the research team at:

Kari Goin  
XXX-XXX-XXXX  
xxxxx@pdx.edu

### **Who can I speak to about my rights as a research participant?**

The Portland State University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. The IRB is a group of people who independently review research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. The Office of Research Integrity is the office at Portland State University that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights, or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Office of Research Integrity  
PO Box 751  
Portland, OR 97207-0751  
Phone: (503) 725-5484  
Toll Free: 1 (877) 480-4400  
Email: [psuirb@pdx.edu](mailto:psuirb@pdx.edu)

### **Consent Statement**

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation.

By filling out the [Google consent form](#), I understand that I am volunteering to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to provide consent prior to me continuing in the study.

## Appendix C: Invitation Email to Advisory Committee Consent to Participate

**You are invited to participate in a participatory action research study alongside PSU faculty, students, and staff.**

### *Participatory Action Research*

**“Radical (re)positioning of students as cocreators of curriculum;  
an exploration of undergraduate student–faculty partnerships in online learning environments”**

Kari Goin Kono, doctoral candidate at Portland State University, is seeking several PSU community members to collaborate in advising PSU faculty in creating a framework for students to coconstruct curriculum with faculty in online learning environments for undergraduates. This is a research opportunity that holds the potential for participants to publish findings related to a new framework for online learning to increase representation and responsiveness of student voice.

**You are invited to collaborate in an advisory capacity for faculty who are researchers of this study which aims to explore student and faculty coconstruction in online learning environments.** Because of social distancing requirements, all collaboration will be conducted using Zoom meeting software. There will be three collaborative meetings, once a month in the Spring 2021 quarter with other participants.

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the student–teacher relationship during the process of cocreating curriculum and highlight the importance of student positionality in curricula decision making within asynchronous online learning courses. If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email so that the researcher can contact you. If you have questions that you would like to ask before deciding to participate, please email:

Kari Goin Kono - xxxxx@pdx.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX

## Appendix D: Advisory Committee Consent to Participate

### Consent to Participate in Research

**Project Title:** Radical (re)positioning of students as cocreators of curriculum; An exploration of undergraduate student–faculty partnerships in online learning environments

**Population:** Adults, Participatory Action Research

**Sponsor:** Dr. Dot McElhone

**Researcher:** Kari Goin, College of Education  
Portland State University

**Researcher Contact:** xxxxx@pdx.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The box highlights key information about this research for you to consider when making a decision whether to participate. Carefully review the information provided on this form. Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide to participate.

#### Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent.** You are being asked to volunteer for a participatory action research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose.** The purpose of this research is to empower coresearchers in the exploration of the process of students and faculty partnering to co-design curriculum in an online format. Goals are to identify challenges, benefits, and highlight transformational outcomes.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will be for the Spring 2021 quarter.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will participate with members of the PSU community including staff and students to advise a research project team on experiences related to online learning, and the student experience.
- **Risks.** Some of the foreseeable risks or discomforts of your participation include: advisory committee members may experience discomfort participating with others on their curriculum that investigates power. Any members on the advisory committee may elect to withdraw their participation at any time throughout the quarter.
- **Benefits.** Advisory committee members may feel empowered to collaborate in a collective action component with project team members that is common in PAR research.

- **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

### **Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of this study is to explore student–faculty curriculum cocreation in the asynchronous online class environment. A goal of this work is to critically examine student–teacher relationships during the process of cocreating curriculum and promote a change in current student positionality in curricular decision making. This study engages in a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to generate new knowledge surrounding community needs by sharing power, engaging in collaborative decision making, and collectively analyzing data to determine findings (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Lykes et al., 2018). Specific to the context of online learning, the pandemic has prompted the need for participatory and collaborative solutions to direct this research to align with understandings of why undergraduate curriculum is not representative of all students.

You are being asked to participate in this study as an advisory committee member. About 12–60 people will take part in this research including researchers, advisory team members, and student participants.

### **How long will I be in this research?**

This research will take place in three phases: Spring 2021: PAR Procedures and Course Development, Phase 2: Summer 2021 or Fall 2021 Course Implementation and Data Collection, and Phase 3: Collaborative Analysis and Action in Winter 2022. Your participation is to attend monthly meetings for a total of three meetings in the Spring 2021 quarter.

### **What happens if I agree to participate?**

If you agree to participate in this research, your participation will include monthly meetings in Spring 2021 for a total of three meetings.

### **What happens to the information collected?**

Information collected for this research will be used to inform our understanding of coconstruction in online environments and will inform a students-as-partners framework for online learning that will be sent out for potential publications related to the scholarship of students-as-partners in higher education.

### **How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?**

I will take measures to protect your privacy. Steps taken include providing all participants a pseudonym in writings about the study and privacy protection in access restricted

online file storage for data collected in this pilot. Despite taking these steps to protect your privacy, I can never fully guarantee that your privacy will be protected. In a participatory action research study, you will collaborate with other team members who will know your identity in this research.

Individuals and organizations that conduct or monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect research records. This may include private information. These individuals and organizations include the Institutional Review Board that reviewed this research and the study sponsor, Dr. Dot McElhone, tenured faculty in the College of Education at Portland State University.

### **What are my responsibilities if I choose to participate?**

Participation in this study relies on all committee members to attend the monthly meetings.

### **What if I want to stop participating in this research?**

Your participation in the pilot is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you may stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from participation at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or Portland State University.

### **Will I be paid for participating in this research?**

Staff participants will not be paid for participating in this research – participation is voluntary. Two student positions on the advisory committee will be offered a \$25 gift card for their participation.

### **Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research related injury, contact the research team at:

Kari Goin  
XXX-XXX-XXXX  
xxxxx@pdx.edu

### **Who can I speak to about my rights as a research participant?**

The Portland State University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. The IRB is a group of people who independently review research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. The Office of Research

Integrity is the office at Portland State University that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights, or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Office of Research Integrity  
PO Box 751  
Portland, OR 97207-0751  
Phone: (503) 725-5484  
Toll Free: 1 (877) 480-4400  
Email: [psuirb@pdx.edu](mailto:psuirb@pdx.edu)

### **Consent Statement**

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation.

By responding to the invitation email, I understand that I am volunteering to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to provide consent prior to me continuing in the study.

## Appendix E: Informed Consent Letter to Students

**You are invited to participate in a participatory action research study.**

### ***Participatory Action Research***

**“Radical (re)positioning of students as cocreators of curriculum;  
an exploration of undergraduate student–faculty partnerships in online learning  
environments”**

The research team on this study at Portland State University is seeking students to participate in a study on student-faculty partnerships in online learning environments. This is a research opportunity for students to share their experiences about making choices within their learning.

**You are invited to participate in this study which aims to explore student and  
faculty coconstruction in online learning environments in a 30-minute interview.**

Because of social distancing requirements, all interviews will be conducted using Zoom meeting software.

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the student–teacher relationship during the process of cocreating curriculum and highlight the importance of student positionality in curricula decision making within asynchronous online learning courses. If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email so that the researcher can contact you. If you have questions that you would like to ask before deciding to participate, please email:

Kari Goin Kono - xxxxx@pdx.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX

## Appendix F: Student Consent to Participate

### Consent to Participate in Research

**Project Title:** Radical (re)positioning of students as cocreators of curriculum; An exploration of undergraduate student–faculty partnerships in online learning environments.

**Population:** Adults, Participatory Action Research, Interviews

**Sponsor:** Dr. Dot McElhone

**Researcher:** Kari Goin, College of Education  
Portland State University

**Researcher Contact:** xxxxx@pdx.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The box highlights key information about this research for you to consider when making a decision whether to participate. Carefully review the information provided on this form. Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide to participate.

| Key Information for You to Consider  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Voluntary Consent.</b> You are being asked to volunteer for a participatory action research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation. Additionally participation in this study will not affect student grades in any way.</li> <li>● <b>Purpose.</b> The purpose of this research is to document the process of students and faculty partnering to co-design curriculum in a remote format. Goals are to identify challenges, benefits, and highlight transformational outcomes.</li> <li>● <b>Duration.</b> It is expected that your participation will take place in either the Summer 2021 or Fall 2021 quarter.</li> <li>● <b>Procedures and Activities.</b> You have the opportunity to opt-in to being interviewed for this study.</li> <li>● <b>Risks.</b> Some of the foreseeable risks or discomforts of your participation include: students may be uncomfortable with their interview and wish to have their writing withdrawn from the study. Students may at any point ask to have their interview transcripts withdrawn from the data. Students may experience discomfort being interviewed during this study. To address this possibility students may ask to stop the interview at any time.</li> <li>● <b>Benefits.</b> Students may feel empowered to participate in the writing of this study as part of a participatory action research methodology. This</li> </ul> |



may have a potential impact on their research agenda by providing a coconstructed researcher experience within the university.

- **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

### **Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of this study is to explore student–faculty curriculum cocreation in the asynchronous online class environment. A goal of this work is to critically examine student–teacher relationships during the process of cocreating curriculum and promote a change in current student positionality in curricular decision making. This study engages in a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to generate new knowledge surrounding community needs by sharing power, engaging in collaborative decision making, and collectively analyzing data to determine findings (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Lykes et al., 2018). Specific to the context of online learning, the pandemic has prompted the need for participatory and collaborative solutions to direct this research to align with understandings of why undergraduate curriculum is not representative of all students.

You are being asked to participate in this study as an advisory committee member. About 12–60 people will take part in this research including researchers, advisory team members, and student participants.

### **How long will I be in this research?**

This research will take place during either Summer 2021 or Fall 2021 quarter at Portland State University.

### **What happens if I agree to participate?**

If you agree to be in this research, your participation will include an option to participate in a 30-minute interview about your experience in coconstructing curriculum as part of this study.

### **What happens to the information collected?**

Information collected for this research will be used to inform my participatory action research dissertation and potential publications related to the scholarship of students as partners in higher education.

### **How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?**

I will take measures to protect your privacy. Steps taken include providing all participants a pseudonym and privacy protecting all online file storage for data collected. Despite

taking these steps to protect your privacy, I can never fully guarantee that your privacy will be protected.

Individuals and organizations that conduct or monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect research records. This may include private information. These individuals and organizations include the Institutional Review Board that reviewed this research and the study sponsor, Dr. Dot McElhone, tenured faculty in the College of Education at Portland State University.

**What are my responsibilities if I choose to participate?**

If you opt-in to participate in this study, you will be offered a 30-minute interview with a project team member from this study.

**What if I want to stop participating in this research?**

Your participation in the pilot is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you may stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from participation at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or Portland State University or your grade (if applicable).

**Will I be paid for participating in this research?**

Participants will not be paid for participating in this research – participation is voluntary.

**Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research related injury, contact the research team at:

Kari Goin  
XXX-XXX-XXXX  
xxxxx@pdx.edu

**Who can I speak to about my rights as a research participant?**

The Portland State University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. The IRB is a group of people who independently review research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. The Office of Research Integrity is the office at Portland State University that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights, or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Office of Research Integrity  
PO Box 751  
Portland, OR 97207-0751  
Phone: (503) 725-5484  
Toll Free: 1 (877) 480-4400  
Email: [psuirb@pdx.edu](mailto:psuirb@pdx.edu)

### **Consent Statement**

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation.

By filling out the Google consent form, I understand that I am volunteering to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to provide consent prior to me continuing in the study.

## Appendix G: Student Invitation to be Interviewed Email

### Interview for Students-as-Partners Study

#### One-on-one interviews:

**“Radical (re)positioning of students as cocreators of curriculum;  
An exploration of undergraduate student–faculty partnerships in online learning  
environments”**

Thank you for selecting your interest to be interviewed for this study.

The project team on this study from Portland State University is conducting interviews to learn more about your experience collaborating to coconstruct curriculum. **I would like to invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview to discuss your experience.** Because of social distancing requirements, all interviews will be conducted using Zoom meeting software and will be audio-recorded for transcription. Interviews will be coded for confidentiality.

The purpose of this study is to document the process of students and faculty partnering to co-design curriculum in a remote format. Goals are to identify challenges, benefits, and highlight transformational outcomes.

Please reach out with any questions to

Kari Goin Kono - xxxxx@pdx.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX

**Appendix H: Researcher Memo Prompts**

1. How do you envision elements from the conceptual framework being involved in the design of your course?
  - a. What questions do you have moving forward?
  - b. What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?
2. What changes do you see necessary to cultivate power/sharing and coconstruction with students for your class?
  - a. Reflect on conversations with the advisory committee. How might you benefit from working with the advisory committee?
  - b. What questions do you have moving forward?
  - c. What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?
3. Reflect on Meeting 3.
  - a. What thoughts do you have attempting self-grading for your class?
  - b. What challenges might you have in sharing power in your class?
  - c. Describe how power sharing is being negotiated on the project team.
  - d. What questions do you have moving forward?
  - e. What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?
4. Reflect on Meeting 4 with the advisory committee.
  - a. What questions do you have moving forward?
  - b. What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?
5. Reflect on Meeting 5.
  - a. What questions do you have moving forward?
  - b. What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?
6. Reflect on discussions the project team has had with the advisory committee including questions and recommendations they've posed to the team.
  - a. What questions do you have moving forward?
  - b. What actions/steps can you take to address these questions?
7. Have you witnessed elements of liberation, engagement, or transformation from students in your class? Please describe.
  - a. Have you witnessed any challenges or barriers that have emerged? Please describe.
8. What emerged for you as a result of this research?
  - a. What surprised you?
  - b. What do you need to know more about?

**Appendix I: Faculty Interview Protocol**

1. How does engaging in the process of PAR inform your perspective on culturally sustaining pedagogy? On coconstruction?
2. How did you approach self-grading in this study? What challenges and/or benefits did you notice?
3. In teaching a future course online, what would you keep and what would you change?
4. What do you think/feel there is to be gained from collaborating with other female faculty in various disciplines?
5. How did engaging in the process of coconstruction change your positionality as an educator [in an asynchronous setting]?

### Appendix J: Student Interview Protocol

1. Can you describe how was it to choose your own content and make choices for your learning this quarter?
2. What are the benefits (*if any*) that you experienced in having choices in your learning and self-assessing?
3. What are the challenges (*if any*) that you experienced in having choices in your learning and self-assessing?
4. How did you engage with technology as a result of collaboration in this class?
5. Can you describe how you have brought pieces of your identity or lived experiences into your work this term? Has this class given you more freedom/less freedom of identity expression or self-expression?

From Jennifer

1. How did choice of content and activities affect your engagement with the course subject matter?
2. How did critical examination of your own life experiences within the context of the course material provided influence long-held assumptions, social beliefs, or the perspective of your own lived experiences?
3. Tell me about your experiences with self-grading. In what ways do you feel that self-grading helped you learn more about yourself as a student?

From Tricia

1. Tell me about your coconstructed curriculum experience. What stories or anecdotes can you share with me about your experiences?
2. What are your perceptions of coconstructed curriculum?
3. How do you perceive the opportunity to coconstruct your curriculum to influence your engagement in the class?
4. How did you perceive your positionality in class?
5. Describe how you perceived your opportunity to use your voice in the classroom.

From Teresa

1. Tell me about your experiences choosing content, activities, or self-grading this term.
2. In what ways were your experiences choosing content, activities, or self-grading helpful to your learning?
3. In what ways were your experiences choosing content, activities, or self-grading challenging?
4. How did technology support you with your learning this term?
5. Tell me about how your identity/identities or lived experiences connected to your coursework this term. How have your experiences in this class affected your feelings of freedom and self-expression as a learner?

From Kim

1. You noted there was an initial film exam that was changed to a broader-based assignment in Week 2. What were your initial reactions to this change?

2. For the film assignment, you were asked to self-grade both in terms of effort and achievement. Tell me what this experience was like for you. Have you done self-grading before? Have you graded yourself on effort and achievement? Is there anything you would change about this format going forward?
3. Are you likely to build self-grading into your own ESOL classes if you plan on teaching?

From Joy

1. Discuss the way this coconstructed curriculum experience differs from conventional classroom instruction?
2. What would you add to this experience? Why?



## Appendix K: Conceptual Framework Overview

[In slideshow]

Slide 1: Research Action Spiral (how we will engage)

1. *Develop* a plan of action to improve what is already happening
2. *Act* to implement the plan
3. *Observe* the effects of action in the context in which it occurs and
4. *Reflect* on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and on, through a succession of cycles (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 5).

Slide 2: Theorization of Student Voice

Slide 3: Radical Pedagogy

Slide 4: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Slide 5: [Discussion - *Develop*] Use framework to inform and critique our understanding

Slide 6: [*Act*] How we will act on our understanding (apply)

Slide 7: [*Observe*] How we want to observe suggested implementations

Slide 8: [*Reflect*] Collective conversation

### Appendix L: Mapping Activity

#### The Conditions for Student Voice Worksheet

(Fielding, 2001, pp.134–135)

| Speaking   | Answer & Describe |
|--|-------------------|
| <i>Who</i> is allowed to speak?  |                   |
| <i>To whom</i> are they allowed to speak?  |                   |
| <i>What</i> are they allowed to speak about?                                     |                   |
| What <i>language</i> is encouraged / allowed?                                    |                   |
| <i>Who decides</i> the answer to these questions?                                |                   |
| <i>How</i> are those decisions made?   |                   |
| <i>How, when, where, to whom and how often</i> are those decisions communicated? |                   |

| Listening                      | Answer & Describe |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Who</i> is listening?       |                   |
| <i>Why</i> are they listening? |                   |
| <i>How</i> are they listening? |                   |

| Skills   | Answer & Describe |
|--|-------------------|
| Are the skills of dialogue <i>encouraged and supported</i> through training or other appropriate means?                |                   |
| Are those skills understood, developed and practiced within the <i>context of democratic values and dispositions</i> ? |                   |
| Are those skills themselves <i>transformed</i> by those values and dispositions?                                       |                   |

| Attitudes & Dispositions  | Answer & Describe |
|---|-------------------|
| How do those involved <i>regard each other</i> ?  |                   |
| To what degree are the <i>principle of equal value</i> and the <i>dispositions of care</i> felt reciprocally and demonstrated through the reality of daily encounter? |                   |

| Systems   | Answer & Describe |
|---|-------------------|
| <i>How often</i> does dialogue and encounter in which student voice is centrally important occur? |                   |
| Who <i>decides</i> ?  |                   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| How do the systems enshrining the value and necessity of student voice mesh with or <i>relate to other organizational arrangements</i> ? |  |
|--|--|

| Organizational Culture  | Answer & Describe |
|---|-------------------|
| Do the <i>cultural norms and values</i> of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement? |                   |
| Do the <i>practices, traditions and routine daily encounters</i> demonstrate values supportive of student voice?  |                   |

| Organizational Culture  | Answer & Describe |
|---|-------------------|
| Do the <i>cultural norms and values</i> of the school proclaim the centrality of student voice within the context of education as a shared responsibility and shared achievement? |                   |
| Do the <i>practices, traditions and routine daily encounters</i> demonstrate values supportive of student voice?  |                   |

| Spaces   | Answer & Describe |
|--|-------------------|
| Where are the public spaces (physical/digital and metaphorical) in which these encounters might take |                   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| place?  |  |
| Who <i>controls</i> them?                           |  |
| What <i>values</i> shape their being and their use? |  |

| Action   | Answer & Describe |
|--|-------------------|
| What <i>action</i> is taken?   |                   |
| Who feels <i>responsible</i> ?   |                   |
| What <i>happens</i> if aspirations and good intentions are not realized? |                   |

| Action   | Answer & Describe |
|--|-------------------|
| Do we need <i>new structures</i> ?                     |                   |
| Do we need <i>new ways of relating to each other</i> ? |                   |

### Appendix M: Validity Criteria

We will engage in discussion of the five validity and reliability criteria, which will structure parts of the analysis and how we collectively determine findings and decide on collective action.

Validity and reliability criteria for action-research include:

1. Generation of new knowledge
  2. The achievement of action-oriented outcomes
  3. Education of both researchers and participants
  4. Results are relevant to the local setting
  5. Discussion of research methodology (if appropriate/if not)
- 
1. Over Spring and Fall 2021 please describe (*if any*) moments where new knowledge was created. [*generation of new knowledge*]
  2. What next steps are important that have emerged from this research? [*the achievement of action-oriented outcomes*]
  3. Over Spring and Fall 2021 please describe key learning moments for yourself and your students. [*education of both researchers and participants*]
  4. Are results from the analysis of this work important to you as an educator and in your field? [*Results are relevant to the local setting*]
  5. With the goal in mind of liberation and transformative learning experiences for both students and faculty, what did this research reveal? [*Discussion of research methodology (if appropriate/if not)*]

**Appendix N: Family Interview Activity**

Project team members will interview two family/community members about their favorite and least favorite educational experiences to engage in an activity that honors various types of knowledge-making and listening. This part of the planning stage serves to emphasize the importance of family oral history and community cultural wealth as a practice in listening while paying attention to potential power dynamics. Taking notes is encouraged.

**Appendix O: Analysis Processes**

- Codebook, .pdf, 245 KB
- Categorical data analysis matrix, .xlsx, 43KB, Excel
- PAR Analysis, .xlsx, 43KB, Excel