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Title:

The Disruptive Dialogue Project: Crafting Critical Space in Higher Education

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Abstract:

The Disruptive Dialogue Project (DDP) is a dialogic network of education scholars committed to fostering conversations that trouble normative practices of critical qualitative scholarship, pedagogy, and methodology, within an interstice of the contemporary educational inquiry landscape. In this essay, we describe the origins of the DDP as well as present a conceptual framework of the Project based on four spatial understandings of our disruptive activity (i.e., the

DDP space as energy, alternative, critique, and possibility). Building on this conceptual model, we provide an overview two specific strategies / spaces the DDP intentionally cultivates as means of transformation and resilience – "disruptive" academic conference symposia and bi-weekly DDP teleconferences –and discuss the role these activities play in the development of our critical colleagueship. Our intent in sharing the DDP narrative is not to promote imitation of our project, but rather to encourage other critical scholars to create, seek out, produce and pull apart interstices of their own; spaces that disrupt the hegemonic narratives of educational research and faculty life.

License Statement:

The Disruptive Dialogue Project: Crafting Critical Space in Higher Education

Interstice, simple definitions:
1. An intervening space, usually empty (*Oxford English Dictionary*)
2. A minute opening or crevice between things (*Collins World English Dictionary*)
3. A small area, space, or hole in the substance of an organ or tissue (*American Heritage Medical Dictionary*)
4. An opening or space, especially a small or narrow one between mineral grains in a rock or within sediments or soil (*American Heritage Science Dictionary*)

Drawing upon these definitions and six years of collaborative efforts to interrupt, interrogate, and transform the normative paradigms of qualitative scholarship within the education research community, we, the members of the Disruptive Dialogue Project (DDP), conceptualize interstices as spaces that disrupt the seemingly complete formation of discourses. Spaces exist where words fall short and daily experiences resist globalizing definition. These interstices often go unnoticed, however, as our minds fill in the small gaps of ambiguity that dot the landscape of the human condition in an effort to understand the world more completely, more fully. Rather than conceiving of such gaps as empty, mere mild annoyances in need of repair, critical inquirers seek to actively examine—perhaps even inhabit—them. In this way, interstices might truly become *interventions*, that is, spaces from which humans can intervene in their realities; spaces that make disruption possible.

We situate the Disruptive Dialogue Project, a dialogic network of education scholars committed to fostering conversations that trouble normative practices of qualitative scholarship, pedagogy, and methodology, within an interstice of the contemporary educational inquiry landscape. More specifically, we have intentionally constructed the DDP as a space in which we might convene and from which we might speak a critical perspective on the discourses of methodological conservatism (Denzin & Giardina, 2006; Lincoln & Cannella, 2004a, 2004b) that sustain and constrain current instantiations of tertiary education. As we have discussed elsewhere (Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010; Kuntz, Gildersleeve, & Pasque, forthcoming) recent governmental and institutional attempts to control the production of knowledge by narrowly redefining notions of quality research and legitimate inquiry according to the principles of science- and evidenced–based research (Bloch, 2004; Cannella & Lincoln, 2004; Denzin & Giardina, 2006; Lincoln & Cannella, 2004a, 2004b; St. Pierre, 2004; Schwandt, 2006) are prime examples of the methodological conservatism we seek to contest. These frameworks undermine, if not outright

reject, "diverse research philosophies and methodologies that are conceptualized from within critical dispositions and have proposed to include the voices and life conditions of the traditionally marginalized" (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004, p. 165). Within the realm of U.S. education scholarship, legislation and policy initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), the Education Sciences Reform Act (2002), and the National Research Council's *Report on Scientific Research in Education* (2002) exemplify federal efforts to establish and enforce consensus concerning the parameters of scientific, and therefore legitimate, educational inquiry (St. Pierre, 2004). These parameters advance neopositivist notions of large-scale, random sample, experimental design studies as the new gold standard for educational research (Denzin & Giardina, 2006; Lincoln & Cannella, 2004a, 2004b).

Drawing upon Foucault's description of "regimes of truths," Marianne Bloch (2004) elaborates on the disciplining and policing functions embedded within the National Research Council's framework of good scientific educational research, noting that:

> This governing of those who are abnormal in the conduct of research—or the understanding of rigor—or the interpretation or use of science—creates a disciplinary margin. Researchers who choose other ways of knowing, looking, or reflecting critically on knowledge construction, selection, and reproduction are positioned as in this margin. Although the margin is not a bad place to be, this particular circumstance creates a group of scholars who are always identified as less legitimate, and/or oppositional. (p. 102)

Within the methodologically conservative framework of scientifically based research, the scholars positioned in the disciplinary margins are those who seek to challenge the status quo via the epistemological and methodological perspectives of feminism; postmodernism; poststructuralism; critical, queer and critical race theories; post-colonialism, and/or indigenous scholarship among others. These scholars are interested in designing and conducting research projects which actively seek to upend dominant power relations and discriminatory practices both in the particular research setting and beyond. Given that the conservative methodological regime of truth described by Bloch is increasingly called upon to inform decisions regarding curricula, faculty selection and promotion, peer review, publication, and research funding (Benner & Sandstrom, 2000; Brown & Strega, 2005; Cheek, 2005; Koro-Ljungberg, Gemignani, Brodeur, & Kmiec, 2007; Lincoln & Tierney, 2004; Stanley, 2007), scholars who choose to contest the scientifically based educational research movement face both psychological and material consequences (Huckaby, 2007; Rambo, 2007). Indeed, Cannella and Lincoln (2004) observe that "researchers who do not 'bow' to the conservative

methodological powers are denied resources and potentially disqualified from participation in the newly defined research community" (p. 166).

Early in our doctoral studies at our respective educational institutions (Ryan and Rozana at the University of California, Los Angeles, Penny at the University of Michigan, and Aaron at the University of Massachusetts Amherst), we individually struggled to navigate the challenges of articulating and advancing critical methodological principles within what we perceived to be increasingly conservative academic communities (scholarly professional associations, educational inquiry classrooms, research teams, etc.). Unwilling to "bow to the conservative methodological powers" (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004, p. 166) seeking to influence the trajectory of our scholarly careers, we each wrestled with how to transform the academy from within, acknowledging the limited power and voice typically wielded by "emerging scholars." It was lonely and frequently frustrating work. Indeed, a host of scholars have pointed to the isolation and solitude enforced by socialization practices of faculty (and we contend doctoral) work and a lack of work-life balance (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007; Neumann, 2009; O'Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Tippeconnic Fox, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2007). As graduate students become junior faculty, ensconced in the tenure track, they take part in multiple socializing processes—taught to conduct research in particular ways, to ask particular research questions; in short, to become faculty engaged in *legitimate faculty work*. This process is maintained by the momentum of conducting studies, of efficiently moving through graduate coursework, the dissertation process, the job search, pre-tenure years, perhaps hopefully earning and attaining tenure, and on into the tenure of faculty life. It is easy to be carried by the momentum of such a linearly progressive trajectory, to arrive, blinking in exhausted amazement at the different benchmarks of academic success: first publication, pre-tenure review, the tenure dossier itself. As doctoral students simultaneously eager and reluctant to begin our academic journeys, we desperately searched for an interstice in this narrative—a treasured space from which we could intervene and initiate change. Unable to locate this interstitial space in the extant higher education research landscape, we decided to create our own and call it the Disruptive Dialogue Project.

As we elaborate in this essay, the (in)formal structure and evolving processes of the DDP have allowed us to continue to operate within the academy as emerging scholars who insist on critical challenges to normative ways of knowing education. It is a process that allows us to collectively speak back to an academy that otherwise might turn deaf ears to our individual voices. The DDP is a community, a conscious rejection of the isolating properties of academe. In addition to presenting an overview of the specific strategies and spaces we have intentionally cultivated as means of transformation and resilience, our intent in sharing the story of the DDP is to encourage other emerging scholars to create,

seek out, produce and pull apart interstices of their own; spaces that disrupt the hegemonic narratives of educational research and faculty life.

After briefly describing a multi-vocal genealogy of the DDP, we outline a conceptual framework for understanding the *spaces* of the DDP—a way of mapping ourselves as our interstice. We then provide two illustrations of our interstice in action: first, within the confines of physical places like academic conferences, and second, in the practiced spaces of a staple DDP strategy—the DDP teleconference. Finally, we hope to engage a new interstice, via this commentary, to imagine future work within-across-betwixt energizing, possible, alternative, intersecting, and critical spaces.

A Multi-Vocal Genealogy of the Disruptive Dialogue Project

As mentioned, a basic definition of the DDP is a dialogic network of scholars committed to fostering and engaging (including critiquing) critical inquiry in education. Given that "critical theory attempts to avoid too much specificity, as there is room for disagreement among critical theorists" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 303), it is difficult and ultimately unproductive to advance a universal definition of critical scholarship. It is possible, however, to identify a set of core philosophical assumptions and scholarly principles that distinguish critical educational research from other theoretical and methodological frameworks (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). These assumptions include the recognition that data and evidence framed as objective fact within scientific educational research (National Research Council, 2002) are indeed reflections of dominant societal values and political ideologies; an understanding of oppression as a multifaceted phenomenon (e.g., intersecting race, class, gender, and sexual orientation social identities) reproduced through the acceptance of domination and subordination as inevitable features of modern society; and an acknowledgement that "mainstream research practices are generally, although often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 304). As graduate students at our respective institutions, we individually wrestled with the methodological implications of this final assumption—what would it mean to move away from "mainstream research practices" which perpetuate inequality and instead intentionally and unapologetically develop research designs that seek to foster real, material change in the lives of those individuals and communities we study (with) (Brown & Strega, 2005; Cannella & Lincoln, 2009)?

As a result of this common theoretical and methodological thread in our emerging doctoral research agendas, we found ourselves attending the same conference sessions at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Eager to extend our conversations beyond the conference, we

eventually self-organized, adopting structures and enacting practices that facilitated our shared interest in interrogating, interrupting, and resisting dominant methodological assumptions and research practices that perpetuate the marginalization of critical inquiry within the educational research community. These objectives and practices are easy to identify in our reflective hindsight. When the project began and how we found each other are contested notions across our group.

For example, Aaron Kuntz has a distinct memory of Rozana Carducci marching down an aisle of chairs to approach him after he facilitated a symposium entitled, *Interrogating Methodology: Philosophical Questions of Research and Higher Education,* at the 2004 Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) meeting in Kansas City (Kuntz, 2004). She assertively introduced herself and suggested they should collaborate in the future. Making room for the next set of presenters, Aaron and Rozana moved their conversation to the busy corridor of the hotel conference venue and continued to chat, quickly discovering their mutual frustration with the lack of critical methodological scholarship in the ASHE conference program. After exchanging business cards, Rozana promised to follow up with Aaron shortly after returning home from the conference so the pair could brainstorm strategies for expanding the presence of critical qualitative scholarship within the higher education research community.

As noted earlier, Ryan Gildersleeve was colleagues with Rozana at UCLA, and the two regularly had conversations about critical theories and the methodological imperatives that might follow when operationalized in research practices. Rozana invited Ryan to participate in a symposium with her and Aaron the following year at ASHE (Carducci, Evans, Gildersleeve, & Kuntz, 2005). The panel set out to examine imperatives of critical researchers in higher education. An obnoxious (and false) fire alarm was pulled in the ASHE hotel the morning of our 8:00 AM session, which ironically—yet fortuitously—helped increase, the session's attendance. Fortuitous, in large part, because Penny Pasque was awakened by the alarm and took the opportunity of lost sleep to gain a symposium. Penny made it a point to introduce herself to each of us, and to remain in contact following the conference. Penny found kindred spirits in her desire to eschew dominant paradigms. Ryan found an intellectual kinship with new colleagues that promised new opportunities for collaboration. For us, the DDP was born that morning, thanks in part to a fateful fire alarm.

Although she does not contest the narrative presented above, Rozana pinpoints the establishment of regular bi-weekly phone calls as her true beginning of the DDP. During 2006, the DDP engaged as a reading circle that eventually led to a second ASHE symposium (Carducci, Contreras-McGavin, Kuntz, & Pasque, 2006) about methodological borderlands. This was the first time DDP members actively and collaboratively engaged in meaning-making, and it set a new

precedent for process and product. Thinking critically could involve critical action. Critical action relied on supportive and collaborative dialogue. All of this could be put forth through collaborative writing and presentation within an academic space with the simultaneous aims of disrupting the structured space.

Since the 2006 ASHE symposium, the DDP has shared active and on-going engagement across its current members (i.e., the authors of this paper), and a few additional individual collaborators. The format and nature of the project have evolved over time. We have moved from casual conversations in the hallways of the ASHE conference, to the informal exchange of relevant critical methodological references, to the formal establishment of bi-weekly "disruptive dialogue" teleconferences and research memos, to national and international conference research papers, to publications (Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010; Kuntz, Gildersleeve & Pasque, forthcoming; Pasque, Carducci, Gildersleeve, & Kuntz, forthcoming). Each provides us with an opportunity to discuss and collectively address the opportunities and challenges embedded in a commitment to conducting critical educational research.

It is important to note that we do not see our work as propaganda. Rather, our dialogues regularly foreground critique of critical inquiry as we continue to cast an ever-widening net of theoretical and methodological tools (e.g., poststructuralism, critical race theory, queer theory, critical geography, and critical discourse analysis, to name a few). For example, in a dialogue on the meaning and nature of methodological congruence in critical inquiry (Pasque, Carducci, Gildersleeve, & Kuntz, forthcoming), we examine the transformative potential of scholarship that relies on quantitative methodological perspectives to address critical research questions (Stage, 2007). More specifically, we articulate a concern that regardless of the research question framing a study—critical or not—quantitative research processes often perpetuate relations of dominance by reifying roles and power structures that have historically contributed to the subjugation of research subjects/objects (Brown & Strega, 2005). While we do not argue that it is impossible to conduct transformative quantitative critical research, we concur with Potts and Brown's (2005) assertion that a defining feature of critical methodological perspectives is the realization that "whatever the approach, the intention is that the actual process of the research becomes an intervention for change rather than relying only on the impact of the research outcome, or product" (p. 269). We contend critical scholars wishing to examine and address issues of systemic oppression using quantitative methodologies must reimagine the nature of research relationships, data collection procedures, and dissemination strategies in the interest of conceptualizing the process of inquiry, not just the final research report, as a vehicle for intervention. This constructive critique of critical quantitative research is one example of our efforts to identify and occupy interstices within the praxis of educational inquiry in the hopes of

highlighting the potential and necessity for educational research to realize its transformative potential.

Space(s) of the Disruptive Dialogue Project

A key aim of this commentary is to describe the ways and means by which we create and dare to inhabit an interstice in the dominant narrative of educational research: how we intervene and the openings within which we evacuate critique of the (post-positivist) sediment that dominates the academic landscape. In short, we seek to provide an extended illustration of the Disruptive Dialogue Project, drawing liberally from our spatial metaphor of the interstice.

Within postmodern nomenclature, *space* is a term that resists definition. That is, within the DDP, we often infer multiple definitions of space, allowing space to be defined by the context in which it is used. In this way, space is a term relationally defined—drawing meaning in relation to other terms and contexts (e.g., it becomes a means by which we understand other important terms such as *critical* or *disruptive*). Through rounds of memos, we have collectively shared consensus and *dis*sensus around understandings of space as *energy, alternative, critique, and possibility.* As such, we provide a conceptual framework of the DDP based in these four spatial understandings of our disruptive activity. Perhaps, we might hope, as new and different interlocutors take up our commentary, the overlap of these thematic notions of space will afford new definitions to emerge, and new interstices will be produced.

Space as Energy

We have collectively referred to the DDP as space that generates action, or space through which we act. The DDP has fostered sustainable space for inquiry, practice, questions, research, community, commitment, and career navigation. Each of us offers a different set of qualities and skills to the space; each of us contributes a different "energy." In this way, the merging of these energies make up the DDP and provides a means for us to grow / think in a way that is different than if we had navigated the higher education world alone; the sum is *different* than its parts. More specifically, the DDP serves as an impetus for us all to be better than we can be alone—to ask questions, to listen, and to concretize social change in the world in which we live. The space that we have created is energizing, sustaining, and ongoing.

In this sense, the DDP is a space of energy that is, in very real ways, life-giving. The DDP consists of a space in which we intentionally grow and collectively work for change. Here, space is process—never finite, but, instead, defined by the possibility for future change (thus always changing, never static, or

fully enclosed). Alongside this notion of space as energy, stand our articulations of the DDP as alternative space.

Space as Alternative

We have created this parallel universe for ourselves, one that is ongoing through virtual conference calls, electronics, Facebook, text messaging, twitter, annual retreats at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, and other spaces. This is the physical, intellectual, and supportive space that sustains us when it comes to critical inquiry.

We might, for example, look at the spatial landscape of higher education and point to its internal logic as beholden to something like "conservative modernization" (Apple, 2006; Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010) or practices of "methodological conservatism" (Lincoln & Cannella, 2004a). We then offer alternative possibilities for (re)imagining educational research, a new spatial landscape that reveals alternative practices, that (hopefully) makes possible new subjectivities. In the end, we seek to disrupt deeply ingrained spatialized ways of knowing. Ours is a disruptive space of intervention, an interstice that, through the very presence of its critical gap, disturbs the otherwise smoothed over landscape of educational research.

In this way, the DDP is framed as different, or, perhaps more specifically, as enabling a different way of understanding or operating. Through this difference we strive to disrupt, to shift and change, the spatial contexts we encounter every day.

Space as Critique

Spatially, the DDP constructs or operates from a critical social space, one that speaks to/against/within the more normative spaces of educational research. Part of our task is to examine the way in which educational research is part of a larger constructed space, one that legitimizes particular ways of knowing and coming to know even as it delegitimizes alternative aspects of meaning-making. We explicate the social space of educational research and try to locate the gaps that are otherwise uncovered, ignored via epistemological and methodological assumptions that we do not always share. In this way, perhaps, we are critical cartographers, creating new maps for spaces that exist on the periphery of traditional fields of vision. Through these maps we hope to present an ongoing critique of representations that exclude alternative worldviews and overlook critical interpretations of the world in which we live. These critical maps, we hope, offer a disruptive potential to hegemonic processes of meaning-making as they bring in to relation traditional ways of knowing and coming to know with a utopic vision of the unfinished; a belief in critical space as possibility.

Space as Possibility

The DDP is a project (or space) committed to critically examining, (re)imagining, and fundamentally changing the nature of the physical and virtual spaces that comprise the higher education landscape. In this sense, the DDP points to potential, the ability to insinuate change within an environment that we feel needs new spaces for dissent.

Situated in the interstice between the current reality and the imagined future, the DDP seeks to engage in activities that critique, challenge, and/or resist the constraints imposed by the spaces we routinely occupy while simultaneously altering these landscapes in the interest of realizing the imagined possibilities embedded within our critical theoretical and methodological perspectives. The DDP as *possible space* speaks to our work as intent on change, on shifting the seemingly fixed boundaries that circumscribe the field of higher education. We might thus be said to spatialize our collective work by pointing to space as process, as forever incomplete, and, thereby, open to critical interjections of all kinds.

Though systemic change is often a slow and difficult process, our collaborative efforts have fostered meaningful changes in the emotional, relational, and intellectual spaces that comprise our work. Our intellectual identity has fundamentally shifted as we reorient ourselves within the higher education and research methodology communities. Our teaching practices have also changed as we share reading lists and syllabi, reach out to guest speakers with non-traditional approaches, and develop new courses such as "community-university engagement toward social justice" from a critical perspective. Perhaps most importantly, we have worked to cultivate the emotional resources and relationships needed to make sense of and productively navigate frustrating physical environments, to develop and embark upon a congruent research agenda, and to remain hopeful and intellectually engaged despite the seemingly endless stream of disappointments we have encountered within our academic work.

The changes we have experienced through the DDP do not occur in isolation, effects never happen on their own. Instead, alterations to our daily practices produce additional alterations; a ripple effect that holds the promise of social transformation. This dedication to social transformation is echoed in Mary Jo Tippeconnic Fox's (2008) research on the experiences of American Indian women faculty in the academy. She states, "Tunetskuh Keta Naraakauparu" or "keep going … don't give up" (p. 219). It is this belief in the possibility for small change to eventually result in larger shifts to the spatial positionings of the higher education research community that sustains our work.

So what, then, is the DDP? It is a spatial (social) and platial (material) presence, an embodied practice of disruption (Gildersleeve & Kuntz, 2011). In the

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following section we offer a tangible description of our disruptive practices, mapping out how we have collaboratively constructed the DDP as a space of critique and possibility through our strategic occupation of academic conferences—a space and place simultaneously characterized by physical boundaries and the boundless landscape of intellectual community.

Taking the Dialogue on the Road:
The Role and Value of Disruptive Dialogues as Conference Symposia

From the very beginning the development and facilitation of conference symposia has been a fundamental element of the DDP agenda. This makes sense as the project was founded upon a desire to disrupt, critique, and fundamentally transform the physical and intellectual space of the ASHE annual meeting. We have been quite strategic in the development and pursuit of our conference work, however, and we identify this as one of our greatest assets[1]. As described above, we conceptualize our work as a space of critique and possibility, and we have attempted to design and facilitate conference sessions that reflect this spatial orientation. One of the ways we have accomplished this is through our strategic decision to only propose and facilitate conference symposia or panel sessions. Our goal is to engage our higher education research colleagues in disruptive dialogues on the role and relevance of critical methodological perspectives in the study of higher education. We want to move critical methodological perspectives from the margin to the center of the conversation and in order to do that we need time and a flexible presentation space. Rather than being constrained by the rigid structure of scholarly paper presentations (an hour and a half session equally divided amongst four tenuously connected scholarly papers and a set of brief and often times irrelevant discussant remarks followed by a rushed Q&A with the authors), the conference symposia or panel format provides us maximum flexibility with respect to the physical room layout, session outline, and facilitation style, allowing us to disrupt several academic conference norms that undermine our critical approach to the study of higher education. For example, refusing to assume the role of "experts" sitting at the front of the room, we make it a point to arrive early for our presentations, organize the chairs in a circle, and space ourselves out around the room with the intention of highlighting the dialogic nature of our work and this conference space. As such, the space in the center of the room/circle becomes the focus of attention.

In addition to transforming the physical conference space of academic annual meetings, we intentionally design conference sessions that place critique and possibility at the center of the symposia's intellectual community or space. For example, in our ASHE symposia, we have collaboratively constructed dialogues that highlight and critique the methodological conservativism of

contemporary higher education scholarship, calling attention to the tangible and intangible barriers critical scholars must navigate if they hope to survive and thrive in our research community (for example, increasing pressure to secure extramural funding, as well as promotion and tenure policies that dismiss collaborative research endeavors and engaged scholarship with the communities and populations we study). Although the specific themes of the symposia vary from year to year, they each share the intellectual goal of identifying and critiquing the methodological norms and assumptions that serve to constrain and marginalize critical higher education scholarship.

It is easy to get mired down in articulating critiques of oppressive research norms, assumptions, and practices. Focusing on the development of the DDP as a space of critique at the expense of exploring the possible or vice versa does not serve to advance the DDP agenda. Accordingly, we seek to design symposia that engage participants in the imagination, articulation, and realization of new higher education methodological landscapes that recognize and value research as resistance (Brown & Strega, 2005).

Fortunately, our disruptions of academic conference norms have been well received at the Association for the Study of Higher Education, the American Educational Research Association, and the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry as gauged by the number of attendees and the depth of their contribution to symposia dialogues. We acknowledge that active audience engagement is likely a product of self-selection as attendees are inclined to share the DDP's commitment to critical methodological perspectives. While we enjoy the opportunity to learn from like-minded critical scholars, we hope that our continued efforts to ensure the inclusion of academic conference sessions that address the challenges and opportunities of conducting critical research will serve to enhance the visibility of critical scholarship within the higher education research community and encourage more educational researchers to engage in transformational research.

In both tangible and intangible ways, the DDP symposia are spaces of possibility. We seek to explore and advance the possible by sharing the DDP vision, modeling new norms of academic interaction and collaboration, and engaging symposia participants in small and large group dialogues focused on identifying strategies for maintaining our resilience while facilitating the slow process of change within our departments, academic conferences, and the broader higher education research community. In very real and intentional ways, our conference symposia embody the disruptive dialogic roots of the Project—the DDP teleconference.

Disruptive Teleconferences & Critical Colleagueship

Another staple strategy of the DDP has been to engage in regular, bi-weekly teleconferences that we use to discuss issues related to critical qualitative inquiry. Sometimes these conversations revolve around a particular article or set of readings that we have agreed to discuss. Other times we focus on a set of propositions put forth by an academic association, such as the Association for the Study of Higher Education, the American Educational Research Association, or the International Association of Qualitative Inquiry. On occasion we use these teleconferences to plan for an upcoming conference proposal or symposium presentation. We have also recorded and transcribed several teleconferences, drawing upon these texts as the frame for an article on the ethical imperatives confronting "junior" critical qualitative scholars (Pasque, Carducci, Gildersleeve, & Kuntz, forthcoming). Quite often, the fiber-optic space we fill gets usurped by the personal-professional dilemmas we face in our "home" institutions—dilemmas with traveling power as each of us face the challenges and share in the others' successes on the road to and through the tenure-track; a journey we collectively approach with enthusiasm, frustration, and at times, downright ambivalence.

In many ways, the DDP enacts in tertiary education what Brian Lord (1994) termed "critical colleagueship" for K-12 educational reform. In proposing for critical interactions among teachers, Lord emphasized that such relationships might productively allow for progressive educational reform even as it allowed teachers more agency and sense of connection to their own work. In this way, critical colleagueship impacts both the local level of practice and the more macro context of policy and policy reform.

For Lord (1994) critical colleagueship occurs when teachers work toward "productive disequilibrium through self-reflection, collegial dialogue, and on-going critique" (p. 192). Such disequilibrium serves as the impetus for change. Further, Lord foregrounds spaces for "increased reflection, informed debate, honest disagreement and constructive conflict as tools for change" (p. 195). The DDP began through instances of disequilibrium—as emerging scholars feeling on the periphery of normative debates and foci that dominate our respective fields—and developed as a means to make such felt instability critically productive.

As opposed to simply working against a sense of disequilibrium or minimizing its role in our own scholarship and professional identities, we actively sought ways to foreground its presence in our collective work; to critically engage with the space such disorientation makes possible. In a sense, we initially chose to make our uncomfortableness with our own discipline itself an object of study. What is to be made of our initial desire to cover-up such feelings of alienation and

distance? What new possibilities emerge that otherwise would remain uncovered? This theoretical shift provided the energy of our early teleconferences, giving a sense of purpose to our collaboration. In this way, we articulate ambiguities inherent in academic processes that often lead to insecurities in junior scholars and perpetuate power within the academy. As one of us noted early on during a conference call:

> It has to happen, I think, through a degree of authentic connection ... so you begin to build a supportive environment that in turn is self-reflective enough to critique a little bit about, sort of our processes ... If you really want to create strong, critical scholars, you have to have a support structure for critical colleagueship ... you have to find critical colleagueship most often outside your department for political reasons, and most often off-campus.

Thus the DDP began to take shape as a "support structure for critical colleagueship," a necessary means for us to critically understand our own situatedness in the academy, our discipline, as well as the local circumstance of our respective institutions.

Our publication strategy is another tangible example of this sense of critical colleagueship. We intentionally engaged in a "difficult and disruptive dialogue" about publication: an important topic on the road to tenure and promotion. For each DDP publication, we ask the publisher to note, "These authors are part of a collaborative research collective known as the Disruptive Dialogue Project. All authors contributed equally to this manuscript, but have elected an egalitarian authorship rotation order among and across different publication products" as is the case in this publication. The statement is not simply rhetorical. We sincerely contribute equally to each manuscript and rotate authorship in such a way that recognizes the confines of conservative modernization in the academy while simultaneously working to disrupt traditional processes. Such a space of critical colleagueship is created when there is a sense of trust, where imperfections found in the soft spaces of the soul can be revealed.

Our relationships have grown as a large group, and as dyads within the larger DDP group. For example, Ryan and Aaron have a bond where traditional performances of masculinity and competition do not rear their ugly head. Penny and Ryan follow each other on twitter while Aaron is still trying to figure out what a "tweet" is all about. And, Rozana and Ryan are a plethora of knowledge about the latest missteps in popular culture. Together, we operate with an ethic of care and honesty not often found in academic spaces. Such a space of care comes from trust that is both articulated over time and, more importantly, enacted over time. For example, during one conference call, Aaron shared his reflections on how he might productively engage with the parent council at his daughter's school:

> I determined very early on I was not going to try and publish out of it or

anything. That I was there as a parent involved in the community. I wasn't there as a faculty member. And at the same time I'm thinking, "How can I critically apply some of these skills and use the structure?" You know, because then I'm going back to these parent meetings and sort of recognize both my placement as a white, middle-class man with a middle-class job working with parents who are very mixed. My daughter's school is very integrated in terms of class and ethnicity. So, it's me trying to sort of put a toe in the water and say, "Okay, go out there and really work," and I think it could create something pretty cool. Because I'm getting involved in these types of things on a different level, and the trick would be for me to be able to step back. So then it's not about me training the parents, but it's almost as much about the parents training me about how to be integrated into these different communities. So, I think for me I started to determine that I have to start getting invested in these types of things, and I would love it if—because I'm so comfortable and inspired by you all—that if we could start doing some of that kind of stuff too... Admittedly, I'd have to take a deep breath and be like, "Alright, here we go." So, I don't know, I think it could be a pretty interesting project, and we could say it's a side project because we do all need to get published as well, but it might be a means to get at some of that infrastructure that you were talking about."

This example is one that explores conceptualizations of a community-university partnership and the potential for engaged scholarship (or not). In addition, Aaron explores the complexities of his roles as a parent, community member, researcher, and faculty member within a particular space. We are reminded of Dolores Delgado Bernal (2008) when she refers to the *trenza* (braid) as "something that is whole and complete, and yet, it is something that can only exist if the parts are woven together" (p. 135). Like the *trenza*, Aaron explores the weaving together of his personal, professional, and communal identities and, as such, he is "stronger and more complete" (Bernal, p. 135). Yet, it is in the interstitial space of the DDP where Aaron can explore the complexities of his roles without retribution and uncover the ways in which the braid may become more complete when various aspects of his life are woven together. Again, for us, the DDP is both a social and material space for sharing and risk that creates an embodied practice of trust, disruption, and non-traditional notions of scholarship.

Conclusion: On Space and Possibility

We created and continue to situate the DDP within interstices of possibility; it is a space of varying form and multiple functions dedicated to the examination of critical inquiry and transformation of the academy. As such, we have intentionally decided to work within-across-betwixt the academy rather than step outside of the university context to engage in these disruptive dialogues. Importantly, this reflection is not a critique of the choices of others, but a

commentary on where we have intentionally decided to place our energies toward change in the academy—the cultivation of dialogic spaces within academic conferences, graduate classrooms, and refereed journals that reflect critical colleagueship and push on the restrictive boundaries of the academy.

As evidenced in the title of our project, we believe dialogue is a vital component of educational and social transformation; however, our critical methodological commitments underscore the inextricable connection between dialogue and action. Over the past six years we have attempted to disrupt normative spaces within the academy by engaging in a number of distinct and overlapping actions, including: facilitating difficult dialogues which question dominant assumptions of knowledge production and dissemination, implementing innovative teaching and learning strategies, working-the-hyphen between participant–researcher (Fine, 1994), basking in disequilibrium through the tenure process, submitting symposia and research papers that complicate notions of qualitative inquiry, and creating spaces—in journal articles, conference sessions, classrooms, etc.—that disrupt dominant paradigms of research and "truth."

Our aim in writing about the multiple social and material spaces we occupy as members of DDP is not to provide a roadmap others can use to chart a journey toward critical colleagueship; our story is unique and it cannot be imitated. Rather our hope is to shed light on the methodological interstices which dot the landscape of educational inquiry and to encourage other critical scholars to inhabit the gaps and transform these spaces into sites of collaboration, resistance, intervention, and revolution. Such transformative spaces are defined by critical scholars themselves and are not prescriptive. We have found the discursive strategies and spaces described in this essay to be meaningful and productive for our particular dialogic network; other critical research collaboratives will need to identify their own unique constellation of people, aims, and activities. For additional narratives of disruption, resistance, and transformation in the name of advancing critical educational research, we encourage you to read Cannella (2004); Diversi and Moreira (2009); Huckaby (2007); Lincoln and Cannella (2004b); Kouritizen, Piquemal, and Norman (2008); and Stanley (2007). These authors underscore the potential of critical scholarship to examine and interrupt systemic oppression of historically marginalized populations as well as describe tangible actions critical scholars can take to construct spaces within and beyond the academy that are more favorable to the aims, processes, and products of critical inquiry. Collectively these works are a call to action and we hope more educational scholars will heed their call. Although dialogic groups such as the DDP may occupy distinct social and physical spaces across the globe, collectively our efforts are capable of powerful change—cultivating and advancing new ways of knowing, being, and engaging in the world as social researchers.

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Notes

[1] To date the DDP has sponsored ten conference symposia at the annual meetings of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, the American Educational Research Association, and the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. All ten symposia are listed in the references and noted with an asterisk.

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