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Abstract

Bruno Latour famously asked “Why has critique run out of steam?” (2004). In this paper we draw on his ideas to present some resources for “gathering”- for doing education policy research with others- which we are calling ‘critical-dissensual collaboration’. We think that our education policy research ‘critique from afar’ may have run out of steam and we make some proposals for doing critical research, but *with* (a diversity of) others. We offer resources for undertaking critical-dissensual, collaborative education policy research – where ‘realities are not secure but instead they have to be practised’ (Law, 2004, p. 15). This extends the conceptualisation of enactment that Stephen Ball and colleagues have made; from focusing on ‘how schools do policy’ (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), to how researchers and schools (re)do policy together. This article is part of our attempt to underpin this redoing of policy with a politics of dissensus (Verran, 2015) and to develop alternative resources to those that enable a ‘god’s eye view’ of policy research (see Haraway, 1988). As critical education policy researchers we have collaborated as policy actors with others in schools and this article forms out of this work. We discuss what we are calling ‘starter’ concepts as a contribution toward elucidating resources for a dissensual politics of ‘gathering’ in critical collaborations.

Introduction

A gathering, that is, a thing, an issue, inside a Thing, an arena, can be very sturdy, too, on the condition that the number of its participants, its ingredients, nonhumans as well as humans, not be limited in advance. (Latour, 2004, p. 246)

This article charts a change in direction in our critical scholarship; a change that has come about by doing research in schools and in other policy ‘sites’ (parts of the bureaucracy, for example) while simultaneously doing research on the research itself. It has led us to rethink the critical work we do and we have begun to explore and develop some ‘resources’ⁱ for undertaking critical, collaborative, education policy research – where ‘realities are not secure but instead they have to be practised’ (Law, 2004, p. 15). This extends the conceptualisation of enactment that Stephen Ball and colleagues have made; from focusing on ‘how schools do policy’ (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), to how researchers and schools (re)do policy together. This article is underpinned by our attempt to grapple with a politics of dissensus in this research practice of redoing of policy and to develop alternative resources to those that enable a ‘god’s eye view’ of policy research (see Haraway, 1988).

Dissensus, as one of the key ideas that we draw on, brings into question the terms by which we agree to disagree. Its politics forces thought toward active engagement with this questioning of the agreed disagreements (for example, when it agreed that there is a ‘for’ and ‘against’ in a debate and the terms of the argument and the process for unfolding this dispute are laid out beforehand).

A politics of dissensus, like any politics is concerned with ‘What particular choices present in this here and now?’, ‘What is at stake in those choices?’ ‘How might those choices be made?’ But unlike the politics of consensus where those questions are ruled out of play after a consensus has been agreed, in dissensus those questions continue to remain active. (Verran, 2015, p. 54)

So, in working in schools as critical education policy researchers, we have come to see that our collaborations have blurred the distinctions between researcher and policy (re)maker. It is in this blurring that this article plays. We ask, is it possible that we are making change to policy from the ground up- not by working on policy documents or policy details, or even claiming that we are researcher-activists, but by working with others dissensually on schooling (and research) practices that are inf(1)ected by policy? We are not sure, but offer the question as one response to this collaborative work. Another response, (see Heimans, Singh, & Glasswell, 2015) for suggestions about response-ability), and the main aim of this article, is to try to elucidate resources for critical-dissensual collaboration (but see below our caution about collaboration), that we are calling ‘starter’ concepts. These resources are for instigating ‘gatherings’.

Before we do that though we will briefly discuss our work in light of Latour’s question, “Why has critique run out of steam? (2004). This will show why our thinking about how our education policy research ‘critique from afar’ (research *on* others) may have faltered. And we hope it will help to make clear why we are proposing resources for doing critical research, *with* (a diversity of) others.

Critically collaborative beginnings?

With respect to the topic of this paper one might say that, what we are calling, critical collaboration, is a contradiction in terms. On the one hand the ‘critical’ part aligns with the critical policy sociology work of Stephen Ball (for example Ball, 2008); working against the power relations that constitute education as integral to the ongoing reproduction of inequality. On the other hand our use of ‘collaboration’ signals an orientation to research that does not aim to ‘reveal’, understand or otherwise explain social processes. Rather the aim is to work *in* these processes, and change them, with others. So, in the contradiction of the critical collaboration combination we are trying to extend our work on thinking about and doing research as ontological (Singh, Heimans, & Glasswell, 2014)- shifting into territory opened up by Barad’s (2007) ethico-onto-epistemologies- where responsibility for what comes to matter (in both senses of the word) is embedded into knowledge work and its relationally emerging realities.

Latour gives us a way into the ‘critical collaboration’ contradiction.

The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. (Latour, 2004, p. 246)

In the article, “*Why has critique run out of steam?*”, Latour (2004) identifies what we (Parlo and Stephen) have been doing as critical researchers (and why that is no longer viable) (see our recent paper on theory and methods for details (Heimans & Singh, 2016), *and* offers a way forward as the quote above suggests. Our own thinking and writing has often contained, in spite of (because of?) endeavours to do ‘good’ research, a kind of moral certitude, or normativity. We had already agreed ahead of time, what the terms of our disagreement are. We were able to access what was ‘right’; we had earned a kind of epistemological ordination- thinking, “as the critic, you are always right, ‘they’ (the people we were doing research **on**) were merely there to be analysed, so that “whatever they think, their behavior is entirely determined by the action of powerful causalities coming from objective reality they don’t see, but that you, yes you, the never sleeping critic, alone can see” (Latour, 2004, p. 239)”. Criticality has allowed us to ‘unmask’ what others cannot see or know, because we already know who or what the terms of our disagreement are.

As epitomized in the Marxist notion of ideology, ... that people are subjugated because they ignore the law of the system, because they are cheated by the images and fallacies that the machinery of domination presents to them in order to hide the reality of its mechanism and prevent them from becoming aware of their real situation. Therefore the task of the critique was to free subalterns from their ignorance and illusion by unmasking all the tricks and disguises of domination ... (Rancière, 2007, p. 565)

Critical work, in light of this task, is (rightly) undertaken with epistemological diffidence (Lingard, 2015); so there is an acknowledgment of the uncertainties that the theory- methodology processes unfold and the tentativeness of the consequent findings (though the analytical aspects of such research are regularly black-boxed). However, while there is an appropriate diffidence, there is nonetheless in the process a ‘calculation’ (theory/ method/ data/ analysis) of ideas that can inform others about how

to be, or what to do, or to venture further afield as evidence to inform policymaking. (And to speed this along as critical scholars we already know what we are against (the system, capital, neo-liberalism, oligarchs and so on). It is in the ‘calculation’ that we see a space for interruption, not to silence or reject criticality, but to expand its task beyond unmasking; it is still very important to undertake critical research that can both inform policy and change it.

How might the unmasking calculation we have highlighted above be interrupted? What is an alternative to reflexively realised epistemological diffidence? We offer two suggestions. The first has two features. The first feature is to ‘move’ from epistemological diffidence to epistemological certainty. The second feature is that this certainty involves working with ontological indeterminacy. So, rather than being diffident about knowledge, the approach we are pursuing here, would acknowledge the ‘ongoing-ness’ of reality. So that realities are NOT secure until they are practised (see Barad, 2007); they are indeterminate. This places ‘us’ in the thick of the ‘ontological action’ and brings to the fore the responsibility that goes with being ‘involved’ in what comes to matter (in both senses, see Barad, 2007). The second suggestion is to do this ‘certainty’ work in dissensual relations. This is not optional as we see it. Certainty, and who ‘we’ are, has to be composed along the way- in dissensus. And this work is undertaken in the full radical openness of unfolding indeterminacy. To summarise: instead of epistemological diffidence, work toward ‘knowing with certainty’- being certain of what ‘we’ know, how and so on (though, how we might compose this certainty, and the ‘we’ is *part* of the process). So we (the ‘we’ composed in the process) reject the desire to unmask while at the same time attempting to work toward epistemological certainty. Whenever something feels like it might be ‘revealed’ or ‘understood’ there has to be a certainty about this. It is not possible to say, we have ‘found’ this, but then use a diffidence escape clause. So the first step toward *gathering* is to move from epistemological diffidence toward indeterminate, dissensual, certainty.

However, in addition to this (and perhaps against our suggestion for dissensual certainty), the power of critique in education policy research plays (unwittingly?) into the immensity and interconnectedness of problem-solution matrices (problems and their putative solutions linked with and linking ecological, Anthropocenic disaster, terrorism, Trumpism, economic nationalism, and so on) that ‘we’ (researchers) are no longer able easily to stand apart from. So, while ‘we’ may focus on policy or education we cannot allow this focus to remain only here. We have to be able to ‘think par le milieu’ (with, and in, the middle of things) (Stengers, 2005). Attempts to explain or analyse what others are doing require ongoing and direct engagement with the problematics that they themselves face. We have to work with, and into, the situations created by their own responsibilities and obligations (Stengers, 2005)- *and* ours. While at the same time working in the middle of how connected ‘things’ are (our so called ‘open’ social systems (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999); in the midst of entangled emergent nature-culture systemic responsibilities (see Barad, 2007).

Building on these two beginnings, our task in this article has been to create theoretical-methodological resources to enter into (both as a way to enter into and as resources used toward that end) situations for ‘gathering’ (in the Latourian sense). However, and we think that this is crucial in light of the indeterminacy of things, after this entry the resources have to survive in circumstances for which they might not be well- suited (after all they have been made elsewhere). They will have to withstand the ‘objections’

that our emerging research situations raise against them, and if they are found wanting, we need to find others, or augment them, but in any case make a ‘response’ (see Haraway, 2015; Heimans, Singh, & Glasswell, 2015).

‘Cautioning’ collaboration

This article emerges from a number of partnership research projects concerning education and inequality (see Glasswell, Davis, Singh, & McNaughton, 2010; Heimans et al., 2015; Singh, Heimans, & Glasswell, 2014; Singh, Märtsin, & Glasswell, 2013 for details of these). Our key problem, as researchers working in so-called disadvantaged schools and communities, concerns the relation that education (and education research) has to inequality. Poverty persists despite years of research and policy interventions. One of the paradoxes of education research is that so much has been done, especially through sociological work, but still so much remains unchanged; the possibility of reducing inequality through understanding its possible (re)production through education continues to elude us. Although, of course, we don’t mean to suggest that this is *just* a problem of research, its methods and outcomes that can somehow be elided from the circumstances that has made this kind of research work possible.

With respect to ‘cautioning’ the starter concepts we propose are bound up in;

- Our complicity with, and within, milieus (Stengers, 2015) that reproduce inequality, asking: how can we work as critical researchers in full recognition of our complicity in, and with, the objects of our work; recognising that our ‘system’ (research, education, democracy and so on) re-produces inequality so that whatever criteria (our theory/ methods/ analytics/ interpretations/ revelations) by which we are able to judge others and our own work are always part of the problem, and connectedly,
- Our desire to create viable alternatives to critique from afar: how can we work both against inequality (in all its dimensions), instrumentalist and neo-liberalising research, education and schooling practices, and still with other people and places- carefully, responsibly and productively; seeking to “compose and decompose, which are both dangerous and promising practices” (Haraway, 2015, p. 161)?
- The ambiguity that arises within collaboration itself. For example, in English, collaboration means to ‘work with’, and, especially in intellectual work, has a largely positive connotation revolving around working cooperatively with others to achieve (often) shared goals. But it also has a more negative connotation that concerns working, or conspiring, with the enemy. This negative connotation is clear in other languages especially. For example in Dutch, *collaboratie*, is negative as it refers to collaborating with the enemy in times of war (for example the Nazis during WW2). In English, collaborationism captures this more negative connotation. We would not describe the current education system in Australia as being ‘at war’ and our work as being collaborationist. However, we do think that the conceptual ambiguity of collaboration- are we working with allies or enemies (or both, or neither?) - helps us to think through the extent to which, and the ways in which, we are working both with and against ‘others’ (and ponder exactly who these ‘others’ are). When undertaking education policy research *in* and *with* schools (as we have begun to

conceptualise our work [see Singh et al., 2014]) we wonder how we can work together as employees of the ‘state’ and yet also work against the ‘state’ (for example to strengthen schools resources to deal with high takes testing) to *change* policy on the ground.

- The many questions that this kind of research raises- questions about politics and ethics especially- however in spite of the need to keep these questions alive, our aim in this paper is to present resources that other researchers might use experimentally if they seek to undertake similar work.

Gathering the ‘starter concepts’

The starter concepts for Latourian ‘gatherings’ we are articulating here are meant to open up space for new arenas of thinking about seemingly intractable social problems. They are based on what we have learnt in the process of doing design-based co-inquiry research (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012) in high poverty communities. Two questions guide our thinking. 1. how would we do it differently next time; 2. what new conceptual resources can we develop in order to help us do this partnership work (see Heimans et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2014; Singh, Märtsin, & Glasswell, 2013)?

Rosi Braidotti summarises the practical- theoretical angle we are aiming for here. It is work that aims for new configurations of thinking toward a...

“new generation of ‘ knowing subjects ’ who *affirm* a constructive type of pan-humanity by working hard to free [ourselves] from the provincialism of the mind, the sectarianism of ideologies, the dishonesty of grandiose posturing, and the grip of fear.” (Braidotti , 2013, p. 11)

and, recognising that,

“The problem for each practice is how to foster its own force, make present what causes practitioners to think and feel and act. But it is a problem which may also produce an experimental togetherness among practices, a dynamics of pragmatic learning of what works and how. This is the kind of active fostering ‘milieu’ that practices need in order to be able to answer challenges and experiment changes, that is, to unfold their own force.” (Stengers, 2005, p. 195)

The starter concepts begin as ways;

1. for collaborating (and we mean this in a ‘strong’ definition of this idea- one that is not based on arriving at consensus among participants as a goal, or outcome, but instead recognises the diverse obligations and responsibilities (see Stengers, 2005) that divergent practices have and works to clarify and foster these in the process (also mindful of the ambiguity on the one hand of ‘collaborationist’ possibilities, and the other of the materiality of practices),
2. for addressing education problems from the ‘ground up’ (Dumas & Anderson, 2014)

3. for encompassing educational concerns as well (here we want to try to highlight the need for questions about the purposes of research and education (see Biesta, 2014) to remain alive in partnership research),
4. for experimenting (in the sense of constantly testing out the agreed upon grounds for new hypotheses, new ways of doing things, evaluating results, gathering data, generating new ideas, testing them out, and so on),
5. for questioning ‘relevance to practice’ (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014), as Stengers puts it above, creating a “a dynamics of pragmatic learning of what works and how” (2004, p. 195), but realising that agreement about ‘what works’ is subject to ongoing disagreement about the terms about which we might disagree (this would then add an extra layer of difficulty into concluding discussions about ‘what works’) against a ‘technological’ understanding of ‘what works’ toward “an alternative approach in which the question that motivates much technological thinking and doing in education – the question how we can make education ‘work’ – can be taken seriously without ending up in (quasi-)causal ways of thinking about and of ‘doing’ education” (Biesta, 2015, p. 20).
6. for discovering “what else ‘it’ could have been” (see Skafish, de Castro, Maniglier, & Morelle, 2016), where ‘it’ are the practices ‘we’ hold to as valid, and worthwhile.

With these beginnings in mind the “starter concepts” that we discuss here have emerged out of an abductive process of fieldworking in philosophy (Heimans, 2016) (and the idea of ‘doing’ concept work arises from Deleuze and Guattari’s invocation for philosophy to create concepts see Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). This process has involved visiting workplaces (schools and universities) interviewing researchers, district administrators, teachers and principals, trying to make sense of those interviews, reading and writing widely, and trying to do justice to this process. Our approach has become toward slowing rationality down (Stengers, 2005), worrying about what is coming to matter (Barad, 2007) (next). It would be better to write more here about the ‘process’ of deriving the ideas to follow, but the truth is that they have not emerged in a linear or progressive manner.

- They have not arisen out of predetermined analytic processes, or the detection of themes, and
- they have not come from data and procedures of interpretation.

Rather they have jumped out of the haptic connections of thinking/ writing/ reading (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005); a diffident, non-productive, non-reductive set of largely imaginative and un-reconstructable, anarchic processes tending toward flattening out our hierarchies of thought; often arriving unwanted and blurry, while we have been engaged in other practices.ⁱⁱ

The starter concepts are:

1. unforesee-ability,
2. working on the ‘what/as if’,
3. design heuristics.

Interlude: Partnerships and Practice?

There is a strong literature on partnership research that is growing and becoming more differentiated and nuanced as it goes. For example, Gutiérrez & Penuel (2014) highlight some methods for researching education practice that do not “require researchers to specify ahead of time all the elements of an intervention, since practitioners participate in design, and implementation data inform an iterative design process that often transforms interventions” (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014, p. 21). Gutiérrez & Penuel (2014) also ask “What is a partnership if the research plan is fully predefined by researchers?” (p. 21). Our article offers an approach that draws on this line of questioning, but perhaps also makes a leap away from it. Simply put, the conceptualisations we outline here involve researching *with* practitioners- taken in the broadest possible sense - as people who are affected by and/or contribute to problems in education (for example parents, students, policy makers), but, where the outcomes of the processes of participation are unforeseeable at the instigation of the research. This is one element of our proposal. We also work toward resolving a tension that Gutiérrez & Penuel (2014) identify between starting with a “germ cell” idea and having research emerge “across iterations with and by participants” (p. 21) and having a fully developed design before starting.

But is working with ‘practice’ as a dominant mode of rationality really such a good idea? Not if you read Popkewitz’s (2016) critique. He suggests that:

Practice is the contemporary equivalent of the medieval Philosopher’s Stone, seeking educational perfection through reforms that change teaching and teachers. The focus on practice is, at one level, born in the frustration that the massive efforts to reform schools since the second half of the 20th century have not been successful. The concern for practice is also historical. It embodies a particular style of reasoning about science found at the turn of the 20th century American Progressive social sciences to provide knowledge for responding to the changing urban and industrial society. Today, research on practice is defined as essential for educators to find successful strategies for meeting the social and educational commitments of quality and equality (2016, p. 52)

The research defines “practice” through two qualities: descriptions of what people do in schools as the origin of human improvement; and practices as the desired states that make the teacher as a professional expert that enable human improvement. (2016, p. 55)

Practice, as a focus of research, as Popkewitz (2016) suggests, is connected to broader historical trends and ways in which practice is on the one hand a putative agent, and target of, change and on the other an agent of conservation and normalisation;

creating the ideal teacher in the name of whatever practices are taken to be expert, desired, and so on. It is an analysis that gives us some pause. In this pause, we can say that what are attempting to do here is to learn to think and write against practices as normalising procedures (including research practices, like our own and Popkewitz's). What we seek out of our writing are heterogeneous responses to emergent conditions. We hope for unforeseeable entities whose practical knowledge and linked practices are not presently known or done. We seek no models to test ourselves against, nor any for teachers or schools we might work with in the future.

Our ideas likewise here align also with Tierney's suggestion that, "The obligation of the intellectual has to be beyond the ivory tower" (2013, p. 301). William Tierney was making the point, with which we agree, that while speaking to one another (for example by writing journal articles) as intellectuals is a likely and common *modus operandi*, it is just not enough. We need to do more, and to do this 'more', as a matter of urgency. But the question is how.

As suggested above, the methodological-theoretical thinking we will outline is not straightforwardly epistemological in terms of the relations between the 'how' - that is what people in the research might do- and whatever knowledge is produced as a result. Rather it aligns with Barad's (2007) ethico-onto-epistemology where responsibility for what 'comes to matter' (in both senses of the word) is crucial. How we are able to put this kind of 'ontological responsibility' into practice is the key question and one that we hope to contribute some ideas toward here. Fundamental to this is the understanding that research is *performative* (Law and Urry, 2004) - it changes the world - and it takes place *in* the world not *on* it. Research is reconfiguring 'the world' and what responsible research might be- becoming responsible for the worlds we create through our actions- as Barad (1998, p. 102) has put it "[W]e are responsible for the world within which we live, not because it is an arbitrary construction of our choosing, but because it is sedimented out of particular practices which we have a role in shaping".

The rest of the article discusses each of the 'starter concepts' in turn for slowing down the rationalities inherent in educational research on one hand and on the other for enabling critical-dissensual collaboration to occur.

Starter concept 1: Unforsee-ability: recognition of relevance to practice after the fact

We respond directly to the concerns and ideas that Gutiérrez & Penuel (2014) raise in their work, and Popkewitz's (2016) critique of practice focused research. Gutiérrez & Penuel (2014) suggest that relevance to practice should be a criterion for rigour in research. We think that relevance to practice might become one criteria, but the position we put for 'relevance as recognition' means that problems and solutions of people with an ongoing stake in the outcomes of the research create criteria that themselves are unforeseeable at the outset of entering a partnership. In shaping our thinking here we draw on Popkewitz's critique of the way that research in education is caught into the possibility of planning in the present for a desired future, where this hoped for future is connected with changing teachers and their practices. He says:

The designing of the present for the future appears in different nooks and crannies of research; from the idea that of research to identify "what works"

and the search for “practical knowledge” and the reflective practitioners whose action research is to usher in what the researcher desires as the expert and effective teacher. (Popkewitz, 2016, p. 46)

We suggest that whatever has caused the partnership to arise needs to be put at risk to the situations that arise as it unfolds. This ‘at risk’ position is difficult to enter into and maintain, but we think that there needs to be a strongly experimental focus that works on a recursive “rapid prototyping and testing out in practice” model - keeping the partnership learning ‘live’ to the real problems- solution matrices that practitioners face every day. So that the problems and solutions, as they emerge, involving practitioners *and* researchers working together experimentally, might not have been able to be thought or spoken about at the outset. But, they will be ‘recognised’ by practitioners and researchers as being relevant to practice and vital as solutions to important problems. ‘Recognition’ brings to attention an essential ingredient in the methodology, to which we will return later concerning participants having a ‘stake’ in the outcomes of the research.

Our suggestion is that relevance needs to be openly, and from the start, directed to **all** the practices that are identified in the processes of working in partnership. So there is no single practice that the partnership research will be relevant for. How the research will be relevant and to whose practices is something that will emerge over the time and space of the project. Secondly, we suggest that practices may change sustainably when the relevance to practice comes in the form of a recognition of this relevance *after the fact*- so that long term change occurs when concepts that were previously unthinkable have a chance to enter into practices that practitioners recognise after the fact as being relevant in some way. How this relevance is accounted for and in what form it might appear into practices is unforeseeable from the outset. (This article is an example of the changes to our research practices that have occurred through the partnership work. We have begun to realise that we need to be much more speculative about the methods that we employ in doing partnership work, and that we need to open up as many assumptions as possible that we (research partners) hold in the process.)

Before entering into our first large scale research partnership project, our research practices involved standard qualitative research procedures with assumptions about the places of theory, methods, data and so on (even though we have undertaken this work ‘critically’). We have realised though along the way that these processes are deeply flawed when trying to work on and in the complexity and fluidity of partnership research. So, now we are using our writing to think through our learnings and simultaneously embarking on changing our research practices (see (Singh, Heimans, & Glasswell, 2014; Singh, Märtsin, & Glasswell, 2013).

We are also working on rethinking other standardised research procedures like the interview, via proposing the intra-view, or intra-sensorium, taking a process-relational approach. Here the ‘intra’ signals the move from ‘inter’ relations, where entities pre-exist relations, to the ongoing formation of phenomena out of relations. The ‘sensorium’ recognises the full panoply of ‘sense’, not just the ubiquitous ‘view’ that ‘I’ have of ‘you’. Instead, the ‘I’ and ‘you’ emerge out of relations and these are not just viewed as though through a ‘lens’ (maybe theoretical and methodological ones for example). The ‘view’ links with the rational mind ‘understanding’ an ‘other’. The

sensorium involves other myriad ‘senses’ that compose ‘us’ (including of course, a more than human ‘us’ and other than human ‘sense’ (Bennett, 2009)).

So, recognition as relevance to practice will likely occur after the main body of the collaborative work has been undertaken. There may in fact be a strong relation between *when* the recognition of relevance occurs and how sustainable/ impactful it is. Our thinking at present is that the closer to the end of, or even some time after the collaboration, the more relevant solutions might be. Practitioners might only strongly recognise relevance after the fact. The strength of this recognition and relevance might in fact depend on deeply embedded recursivity that emerges from the difficulty of working together in indeterminate ways with the goal of creating dissensual certainties in/to emergent problems.

But how would this work in practice? The first thing to say is that this approach puts a researcher and expertise at risk. There will inevitably be a ‘long game’ where ‘attunement’ (see Manning & Massumi, 2014) is the primary mode of action; this is a kind of slow, improvised dance around concept-practice boundaries, with the occasional clumsy partner toe stepping- “is it worth dancing on?” is the question that rises up from the stubbed toe. The test of the success of this starter is the arrival of a moment, of an ‘ahah’, perhaps well after the collaborations have ended. For example, when doing research into the sustainability of a research partnership in schools serving low SES communities, many teachers said to us that they did not realise how the low expectations they held of their students were such an important part of the problem of these students’ low performance on high stakes standardised literacy and numeracy tests. This ‘ahah’ shifted their thinking, their presuppositions, about what their students couldn’t do (for many very well- rehearsed reasons related to poverty and disadvantage), to what they could do (to the fullness of their ability, presupposing their equality of intelligence (J. Rancière, 1991)).

Starter concept 2: what/ as if; politics in action

Politics, on one hand, opens up for examination the interests that knowledge producers and users might have in the search for solutions. A problem of teaching, for example, is a problem of those who teach and those who constitute what teaching might be and be able to do (e.g. researchers, policy makers, teaching experts).

Politics is not just a matter of exposing ‘capitalist’ interests or some hidden agenda about which we might be (perhaps rightly) suspicious, it means dealing carefully with the concerns that researchers and education practitioners have and the obligations and responsibilities (Stengers, 2010) they have to the full variety/cast of their respondents. Could matters of fact (for example in the sound identification of a problem and *whose* practice it is located in) be reconstituted as matters of concern (see Latour & Weibel, 2005; Heimans, 2012; Latour, 2004)?

In asking “*what if we...?*”, the policy matters, whose future about what might ‘be’ right to do as a solution, are not delayed into an interminably hopeful utopia where knowledge spins on the logics of knowledge makers- only to arrive later as a solution to a problem which was both determined by them and whose parameters have changed over time. In this kind of scenario, what it is to know/ knowledge arrives too late. And the need for more knowledge-making arises. Whatever a practitioner has to learn as a proposed solution is already being made redundant because the truth of

whatever the learning is based on is both someone else's and removed from the temporal, spatial and responsibility/ obligations particularities from which it arose.

On the other hand politics means two further things. First, it involves a reconfiguration of the sensible (Rancière, 2004)- the opening of a space that did not appear, on the surface of things, to exist- to open thought that could not be thought and speech that could not be spoken. Second, it involves the presupposition of the equality of intelligence that all people share and that might be verified in practice (Rancière, 1991). Both of these versions of the politics - knowledge relation involve radical breaks and reconfigurations that will be difficult to achieve and impossible to plan for in advance.

Just to be clear about this- we think Rancière's 'equality' is worth trying out- so we do not propose it here as something that should be aimed for in the future but as an opinion we seek to verify in practice. Equality has to be presupposed- or as Rancière says- it is nothing. In this way we can begin to enact the *as if*. This also does not mean that all kinds of knowledge will be equally valued or valuable or that there is equality among the positions that people occupy in the social space. (The basis of his (Rancière's) argument is that where sociology acts on the presupposition of inequality (which especially sociological work in education does), and the people who are the objects of the research work are thought of as being in a relation of inequality *a priori*; the task of research is to reveal and demonstrate both

1. the processes that were not able to be understood or realised by the people themselves, and
2. the details of the 'illusions' by which they acted, "on the one hand, ineluctable processes, and on the other, controlling illusions" (Pelletier, 2009, p. 3.)

The reality of inequality is easy to see and depends on the ongoing delay that its verification instils. Hence the opinion, that (in spite of the evidence that confirms the 'rightness' of inequality) people have an equality of intelligence and a capacity derived from this intelligence to act. Remembering that, those who have a part are the people who play a role in *saying* what counts as, for example, education. What are the roles that have capacities and functions assigned to them; that have a place in education; how is the sensible of education distributed, who is 'fit' for, capable of, *participation*?

As Rancière writes, it would be wrong to understand those without a part as simply an excluded group from the community. They are not only excluded, but they make up what might be described as a 'constitutive other' against which the ideal of the community is constructed, those whose qualities make them unfit for participation in the demos (Baiocchi & Connor, 2013, p. 92)

Shifting the part/no part boundary, if we follow Rancière, cannot be 'prearranged'. A delicious problem arises here for methodological thinking- no prearrangement is possible, so, "How can the 'no part', take/ have one?"ⁱⁱⁱ This, it seems to us, needs to remain as an open question, that will have no specific answer at any *given* time or place, and so helps us think about a methodology that fundamentally challenges who has a part, and in what. And who doesn't. Dissensus in action.

Rancière's work is not easily categorisable (Pelletier, 2009, p. 565), but;

The ingenuity of Rancière's work lies first and foremost in the fact that he is able to show that what is done under and in the name of equality, democracy, and emancipation often results in its opposite in that it reproduces inequality and keeps people in their place. What matters, therefore, is not *that* we are committed to equality, democracy, and emancipation, but *how* we are committed to these concepts and *how* we express and articulate this commitment. (Biesta, 2010, pp. 56-57)

And tied into the 'how' is the 'who': who can redo policy?

Starter concept 3: Educational Design heuristics

Design heuristics are used in engineering and design (see (Kramer, Daly, Yilmaz, & Seifert, 2014; Kramer, Daly, Yilmaz, Seifert, & Gonzalez, 2015)). They are tools that designers and engineers use for creating concepts and solutions to problems. Our use is related, though, rather than posit them as a tool, we suggest that instead they are starter concepts. So in this sense they are meant to start something, though they may change along the way (this is different from their use in engineering where there are 77 design heuristics that are able to be followed that assist in the creation of ideas, prototypes and so on (see (Kramer et al., 2014)).

Educational design heuristics are meant to be read *together* by citizens, policymakers, researchers, educational institution staff, the 'no part' (Rancière, 2007), as a provocation to action, and as a resource for thinking/ acting 'otherwise' about how to work on problems (that emerge out of 'collaborations' and 'gatherings') that have no easy solutions- but which are nonetheless very important to engage with and to make progress toward solving. And for thinking and acting *educationally* (Biesta, 2006).

An educational design heuristic is a framework with a dissolving frame. The 'nature' of the 'work' is constantly under renegotiation as a result. An educational design heuristic is a crossing of ideas that don't line up easily. Where they do intersect, there are lines of tension. Conceptual difficulties that we hope 'invite in' a range of materials, that create 'lines of force' and constraints with potential re-orderings that open up in the flow of working on things together. They are based on readings that are divergent and irreconcilable.

This divergence is purposeful so that 'we' might act together not toward agreement, nor expecting that we will come to solutions with any speed- rather there is implied here a long term commitment to ongoing disagreement- to taking seriously (in an ontological sense) the worlds of others and that other worlds are necessary and possible.

The educational design heuristic we suggest here cuts together the work that;

- Biesta (2014) has undertaken on the purposes of education (socialisation, qualification, subjectification) with,
- Rancière's (2009) work on questioning the alignment between given positions, capacities and roles, with,

- Barad's (2007) emergent realism- to worry about the –space- times that are emerging and what is coming to matter in the process in thinking about education purposes and positions, roles and capacities.

These three together will put thinking/acting out of order. Barad's onto-epistemology could not be more contrary to Rancière's non-ontological work. Biesta does draw on Rancière, though Rancière is not interested in making straightforward suggestions about the purposes of education. The question arises about how to mobilise these ideas into, and to create, new situations together. We begin, in a current project, with reading Biesta together. Questions arise, "How does subjectification, and its linking of emancipation and education together redistribute who and what can make sense about what (and whom)?" "Might a school and its students become knowledge producers (Rowan & Bigum, 2010) rearranging the sensible distribution (Jacques Rancière, 2004) of schooling, of knowledge? Might the orders of knowledge *be* upset? Might the delay that this order instils be overcome? What new temporal, spatial arrangements emerge? What comes to matter then, to, and for whom?"

Conclusion

A starter concept is thus conjured up for composing in disagreement; toward a politics and ethics of dissensus:

An ethics of dissensus, expressing a metaphysical commitment to emergence of worlds all of a piece in here and now's, resists established power relations and transforms the negative moment of resistance into the creation of new modes of beings. The emphasis on discontinuous becoming and emergence that this analytic enables, shifts the ethical problematic from the concern with universal (or relativised) norms enacted as consensus, to tasks of transforming here and now's beyond present limits. ... A politics of dissensus, like any politics is concerned with 'What particular choices present in this here and now?', 'What is at stake in those choices?' 'How might those choices be made?' But unlike the politics of consensus where those questions are ruled out of play after a consensus has been agreed, in dissensus those questions continue to remain active. Assenting here and now in going on together doing this, is limited and contingent. There is shared recognition that what we do together is subject to a continuing and active deferral of the always hovering possibility of withdrawing assent, of stopping things in their tracks (Verran, 2015, p. 54).

As an example of its use a starter concept might enter into the initial planning for a long-term partnership between a school, a community and a university- a 30-year equity-oriented plan, for example, to create ongoing resource exchange and support by a university of its schools and the people they serve. It would be a place to start from, with others, whose worlds diverge and with whom we would seek to make change, education policy change, from the ground up. Policy is always made by those who have a part in constituting the 'sensible', but can it be remade by others whose part is that of the 'no part' (see Rancière, 2007). *In* the process, might policy *become/remain* political?

A starter concept is offered as a resource for opening up critique toward dissensus allowing a diversity of 'others' in, in substantive ways. These others include the

people and objects we are researching with (for example teachers, students, technologies) and various theories, methodologies and so on. Secondly, and this relates to letting others 'in', critical-dissensual collaboration affords the various elements of our research to keep renegotiating productive settlements with others; here we are thinking especially of the relations between the empirical, theoretical and the aims of the research to make a difference.

If we are able to put at risk the presupposing we do that is bound up with our theories, the methodological tools they invite, and the perceptions we have of our work and its impacts, and the way we view the 'empirical' and 'data', and stop; what might we be able to do in that space that opens for and by dissensus? Whatever that becomes, we hope that it will be an 'addition' - one that not only adds to reality, but also adds to the possibility of continuing to do critical policy research that expands criticality to the vagaries that such 'addition' invokes; and *by* "gathering" in dissensus. This is how we see some new beginnings for our critical policy scholarship to inform policy differently, and, *with* ontological dissensual diffidence.

Disagreement' and 'dissensus' do not imply that politics is a struggle between camps; they imply that it is a struggle about what politics is, a struggle that is waged about such original issues as: 'where are we?', 'who are we?', 'What makes us a we', 'what do we see and what can we say about it that makes us a we, having a world in common? (Rancière, 2009, p. 116)

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ⁱ 'Resources' is in scare quotes because we want to highlight that we are conceptualising 'resources' in terms of process metaphysics [contra substantialist metaphysics] ((Mesle , 2008); so resources are those relationally emergent phenomena (Barad, 2007) that are drawn into, and on, in the process of becoming, see also Whitehead (2010) and Ford on Whitehead's datum (Ford, 2004); but it is not within the scope of this article to flesh this out further here.

ⁱⁱ For example, in driving away from a school after completing interviews with the leadership group, our discussion turned to our desire to think about our experiences in terms of how schooling seemed not just to be caught up into the logics of policy as numbers (Lingard , 2011) , and ex- and endogenous privatisations (Ball, (2008), but as a kind of hybrid forum (Callon, Lascoumes, & Barthe, 2009), where boundaries seem to overflow. In any case, our critical researcher vernacular seemed vastly under-resourced to deal adequately with moving beyond an analysis that either did justice to these overflows and/or the potential that seemed to gather in them for change.

ⁱⁱⁱ We note that a lot of participative community- based or life long learning research has also dealt with the question of including those who are usually excluded. See for example (Damon et al., 2017; Gibson et al., 2017). We thank an anonymous reviewer for reminding us about this.