Collaborative mentoring: The Discourse Analysis Research Team

Discourse analysis is a research methodology that examines how language choices construct, and can therefore change, social worlds. The Discourse Analysis Research Team (DART), launched in 2008, seeks to model collaborative scholarship and mentoring for graduate students. DART was conceived by graduate students enrolled in the fall 2007 discourse analysis course (EP631) as a way to gain experience with the methodology and to create a space where they support each other as they began to conduct their own studies. Dr. Trena Paulus (EPC) currently coordinates DART, and students across CEHHS have participated over the past four years.

DART began by working together in the spring and fall of 2008 on a large data set of blog transcripts generated by students in Nutrition 100. This data was part of a larger study co-investigated by Dr. Marsha Spence (Nutrition) and Dr. Paulus which has culminated in several papers co-authored by DART participants and faculty.


Several proposals for external funding were submitted to the National Science Foundation to continue the project. While these were not funded, they provided valuable experience to students about the grant-writing process. Soon, students began launching their own discourse analysis research studies, and DART evolved into a working group where students would bring drafts of their proposals, dissertation chapters, and journal article manuscripts for critique as well as engaging in “data sessions”. In 2010, Doug Canfield (Learning Environments and Educational Studies), was the recipient of a Social Science Research Council Fellowship for his pre-

dissertation work on language learning in the virtual world SecondLife, using discourse analysis as a methodology.

Four of our original DARTers graduated in spring of 2011, and two of these students completed discourse analysis dissertations: Rachael Gabriel of Literacy Studies (Richard Allington, Chair, Tennessee Teacher Evaluation Policies under Race To The Top: A Discursive Investigation), who is now an Assistant Professor of Reading Education at the University of Connecticut, and Jessica Lester of Applied Educational Psychology (Paulus, Chair, The Discursive Construction of Autism: Contingent Meanings of Autism and Therapeutic Talk), who is now an Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology at Washington State University. Olivia Halic (Kathy Greenberg, Chair), now a Research Analyst with International Baccalaureate in Bethesda, MD, and Kathy Evans (Kathy Greenberg, Chair), now an Assistant Professor of Education at Eastern Mennonite University, were also actively involved with DART during their years at UTK. Gabriel and Paulus are finalizing a manuscript around the impact of facilitator talk on decision-making in advisory committee meetings, and Lester and Paulus currently have an article in press from Lester’s dissertation.

Two more DARTers are nearing the dissertation stage of their studies. Joshua Johnston (English Education) will be studying the construction of teacher identity (Susan Groenke, chair) and Elizabeth Price (Applied Educational Psychology) will be conducting a discursive analysis of individualized transition planning meetings (Paulus, chair).

Several other research studies and discussions are underway this semester. Mary Alice Varga (Applied Educational Psychology), Trena Paulus, and Blair Mynatt (Counselor Education) are finalizing a manuscript entitled *Constructing grief: A discourse analysis of an online grief support group*. Amber Hughes (Counselor Education) and Blair Mynatt (Counselor Education) are launching a new study entitled *Doing being 'a helper': developing counselor identity in introductory counseling skills course*. Vittorio Marone (Learning Environments and Educational Studies) is exploring how discourse analysis can be used to look into online gaming communities, and Ginny Britt (Instructional Technology) is participating in a study with Trena Paulus and Jessica Lester on the discourse of technology use in introductory qualitative research texts.

Now starting our fifth year, DART’s membership is growing, and we are evolving along with the needs of the graduate student participants. For the first time, we are trying out a reading group structure for those who want to delve more deeply into the theoretical and methodological foundations of critical discourse analysis (CDA), one specific type of discourse analysis. Participants in the CDA reading group in spring 2012 are Rachel Madron (Literacy Studies), Jennifer Lubke (Literacy Studies), Renee Moran (Literacy Studies), and Traci Yates (Sport Studies).

*Spring 2012 CDA DARTers: Madron, Yates, Moran, Lubke & Canfield*

We look forward to what future semesters of DART may bring!