

*Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 6,  
November–December 2004, pp. 3–11.  
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ISSN 1061–0405/2004 \$9.50 + 0.00.

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## Guest Editor's Introduction

### Bakhtin's Dialogic Pedagogy

As far as we know, this unfinished article, offered to English-speaking readers for the first time, is the only article written by Bakhtin directly on issues of education. This unique educational article by Bakhtin offers many valuable lessons for educational researchers. It helps to situate Bakhtin in education and to discuss how the field of education uses Bakhtin's framework. What Bakhtin's teaching experiences and practices were, and what lessons Bakhtin's article offers to readers.

Bakhtin often referred to himself as a philosopher (Bakhtin, Duvakin, and Bocharov, 2002) while others have considered him to be a literacy critic, linguist, and philologist (Clark and Holquist, 1984). In the areas of education, interest in Bakhtin's scholarship has been steadily growing since the late 1980s (as my analysis of the numbers of references to Bakhtin in the ERIC [Educational Resources Information Center] database showed).<sup>1</sup> Educational researchers have seen Bakhtin's framework as very relevant for addressing many educational issues. Scholarship in language art education (Gee, 1996) and specifically in writing composition (Ewald, 1993) utilizes Bakhtin's conceptual framework more than any other area of educational research. This is not surprising, taking into consideration that Bakhtin's "empirical" material was language and literary work. However, researchers in other educational areas such as bilingualism (Moraes, 1996), mathematics (Forman and Ansell, 2001), science (Lemke, 1990), and multicultural education (Matusov, Pleasants, and Smith, 2003) also have found Bakhtin's conceptual framework useful. In re-

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search on instruction, Bakhtin's notion of dialogue becomes especially fruitful (Skidmore, 2000). Bakhtin's notion of carnival has been evoked when researchers discuss learning environments, particularly classroom management and pedagogical regime (Lensmire, 1994). Bakhtin's social critique of the official, arguably totalitarian, culture is often compared with the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1986) despite the fact that Bakhtin was politically on the conservative right, most likely being a monarchist (Bakhtin, Duvakin, and Bocharov, 2002), while Freire was on the progressive left. In the areas of educational research, such Bakhtinian notions as dialogue (dialogicity, dialogism, and so on), heteroglossia, voice, polyphony, addressivity, genre, stylistics, discourse, and ideology are commonly used.

Like many academicians, Bakhtin was an educator himself. He taught various courses on literature and theory of literature from 1936 to 1937 and from 1945 to 1961 at the Pedagogical Institute (teaching teachers and literacy scholars) in Saransk (the capital of the Mordovian Autonomous Republic, now a part of the Russian Federation). According to his former students, he was a very charismatic, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic teacher. Bakhtin's classes were very popular and crowded with students who wanted to hear his lectures even though they were not formally enrolled in his classes. Often, even faculty members attended his classes. Bakhtin always connected well with his audience and was able to engage them in the material being presented. He was skillful in tuning his presentations to diverse audiences at any level. For example, in the late 1950s, he gave a lecture on literary aesthetics at a lightbulb factory in front of as many as 700 electrical workers. He often started his presentation with an example from everyday life and then moved to more abstract matters (what is arguably known among today's educators as "activation of prior knowledge"). For example, in his lecture on the nature of aesthetics, he started by discussing why people have two eyes instead of one and what happens when a person loses one eye. Then he moved on to the fact that many characters of Pushkin, Russia's most famous and celebrated poet and writer of the nineteenth century, sometimes have crossed eyes, which he led to a discussion of the popular Russian adage, "The eyes are the mirrors of the soul," which he brought back to the main topic of his presentation (Clark and Holquist, 1984).

Bakhtin also had unusual teaching jobs for a literary scholar. For example, he successfully taught peasants bookkeeping in the newly organized collective farms between 1933 and 1936 when he was in exile in Kustanai, Kazakhstan. In September 1941, during the Germans' rapid invasion of the Soviet Union, Bakhtin got a job as a schoolteacher teaching German. In the absence of textbooks, Bakhtin used propaganda leaflets the Germans dropped on the town of Savelovo (about 60 miles outside Moscow). From the beginning of 1942 to September 1945, Bakhtin taught Russian in the local Savclovo

schools to children mainly from working-class families (Clark and Holquist, 1984).

Bakhtin wrote this article in his last year of working as a Russian teacher in the Savclovo schools, probably in 1945 (see comments of Russian scholars following the article). In a narrow sense, the article is methodological: it is devoted to an issue of how to teach students the proper way to use conjunctions between clauses of complex sentences. However, it also has many interesting, thought-provoking features and lessons for educational researchers.

First, Bakhtin's personal circumstances surrounding the article are very interesting and instructive. Entering the field of education, a new area of scholarship, Bakhtin demonstrated his tenacity. The article is full of references to relevant pedagogical literature. This means that Bakhtin had to educate himself in the new area of scholarship, education—not an easy task for a literary scholar living in a Russian province during World War II. Although the town of Savclovo was not far from Moscow, Bakhtin's visits to Moscow were very dangerous for a person who had been convicted of political crimes and sent into exile in 1929 (like many people of his circle, Bakhtin probably had to live in constant fear of arrest in those years as Stalinist terror continued until the death of the dictator in 1953). Bakhtin's health was slowly deteriorating. He lost one leg to a progressive bone disease in 1938. Soviet institutions were not very "friendly" to people with physical handicaps.

Second, the article was written for a diverse audience: teachers-practitioners, educational researchers, and linguists. Bakhtin's writings have always been distinguished by addressivity to diverse professional communities. Bakhtin's dialogic approach was essentially multidisciplinary because he believed that dialogue, and thus meaning, occurs on the boundaries of diverse consciousnesses and diverse communities.

Third, several students were involved in writing the article. The second draft of the article discovered in the archive was written not by Bakhtin but by a few students, presumably Bakhtin's senior students (equivalent to U.S. high school students). The Russian commentators suggest that the students' role was limited to "scribes": Bakhtin dictated his text to them. However, taking into consideration that those students were also Bakhtin's "research subjects" and the primary focus of the article (as a good teacher, Bakhtin unlikely missed this learning opportunity of not engaging his students in discussion of the substance of his article), it is difficult to accept that the students were simply scribes and did not discuss the article with Bakhtin and among themselves. In his later work published in the early 1970s (but planned in the 1930s and 1940s), Bakhtin called for new humanitarian sciences where "subjects" of scientific research would not only be objectivized but also addressed and subjectivized through bringing their voices in the research as dialogic responses

to researchers' statements about them (Bakhtin, 1986). His work on the article with his students suggests his idea of the new humanitarian sciences.

Fourth, Bakhtin presented an empirical study in his article. Bakhtin started his study with diagnosing and documenting a pedagogical problem. He analyzed about 300 essays written by students in seventh grade and 80 essays by those in tenth grade (the highest grade in the Soviet high school) and had follow-up conversations with the students about the syntax rules. He found that, although his students successfully demonstrated knowledge of the syntax of complex sentences without conjunction words, they rarely used these complex sentences without conjunctions in their own essays. Then he developed and applied what can be called "dialogic pedagogy" in his lessons in seventh- and tenth-grade classrooms to address this problem. Finally, he analyzed the essays done by the students after they had received his instruction and found rather remarkable changes demonstrating the success of his dialogic pedagogy.

On the surface, Bakhtin's research design seems to be a traditional pretest–intervention–posttest laboratory experiment. However, it would be more correct to compare Bakhtin's methodology with L.S. Vygotsky's "formative experiment" combining teacher's active participation with careful monitoring of the developmental changes of the participants under study (Newman, Cole, and Griffin, 1989; Veer and Valsiner, 1991). As Newman argues, "In a formative experiment, the researcher sets a pedagogical goal and finds out what it takes in terms of materials, organization, or changes in the technology to reach the goal. Instead of rigidly controlling the treatments and observing differences in the outcome, as in a conventional experiment, formative experiments aim at a particular [pedagogical] outcome and observe the process by which the goal is achieved" (P. Griffin, personal communication: quoted in Newman, 1990, p. 9). Although Bakhtin probably knew Vygotsky, it is doubtful that he was directly influenced by Vygotsky's work on formative experiments. It is more likely that Bakhtin "reinvented" the formative experiment research methodology. Probably, Bakhtin was the first educational researcher who used and described a formative experiment in education.

Fifth, this article developed and described a new type of instruction that can be called "dialogic pedagogy" that contrasts with "monologized pedagogical dialogue" (Skidmore, 2000). Bakhtin defined pedagogical dialogue in his 1929 book about Dostoevsky's poetics:

In an environment of . . . monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus a genuine dialogue is impossible as well. In essence . . . [monologism] knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: *someone who knows and possesses the*

*truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and a pupil, which, it follows, can only be a [monologized] pedagogical dialogue.* (Bakhtin and Emerson, 1999, p. 81, emphasis added)

In monologized pedagogical dialogue, "a thought is either affirmed or repudiated" by the authority of the teacher. Bakhtin coined the term "monologized pedagogical dialogue" (Bakhtin and Emerson, 1999, p. 279) when he criticized the Socrates/Plato dialogues in which the teacher never learns anything new from the students (despite Socrates's ideological claims of the opposite). The student's individuality expresses itself only as an error. Truth is impersonal and decontextualized. Monologized pedagogical dialogue describes the traditional instruction of Russian in Soviet schools based on memorization of grammar rules, dictations, and drills. This type of instruction led, as Bakhtin describes in his article in this issue, to scholasticism.

In the best case, the narrowly grammatical study of these issues merely enables students to do a fair job of diagramming an assigned sentence in a ready-made text and teaches them how to use punctuation marks in dictations; however, their own oral and written language remains almost completely unenriched with the new structures they have been taught. Many never use the forms that they have learned through the study of grammar, and, when others use them, they do so with utter ignorance of stylistics.

Teaching syntax without providing stylistic elucidation and *without attempting to enrich the students' own speech* lacks any creative significance and does not help them improve the creativity of their own speech productions, merely teaching them to identify the parts of ready-made language produced by others. But this is precisely the definition of scholasticism. (p. 16)

In contrast, dialogic pedagogy is based on colliding and testing diverse ideas presented by different voices, by different members of a community. It involves genuine interest in each other. In dialogic pedagogy, the teacher does not look for a student's errors but rather learns from the student how the student sees the world and him/herself. Disagreements between the student and the teacher are valued, respected, and expected. Bakhtin argued that truth has an inherently dialogic nature.

"Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin and Emerson, 1999, p. 110).

The truth is born out of a dialogue. To teach the truth means to dialogize the truth—to dialogize the targeted curriculum. The process of dialogizing the curriculum is defined by Morrell (2002) who talks about *deconstructing* and *problematizing* canonical texts to teach urban minority students. Bakhtin did

similar work in deconstructing and problematizing grammar. He demonstrated how to dialogize the curriculum of grammar by revealing the "stylistic and dramatic" (read "dialogic") origin of grammar (for more discussion of Bakhtin's use of terms of "dramatism" and "dialogicity" see the Russian commentaries, [see p. 44, note 26, in this issue for more discussion]). The author's transformation of grammatical forms provokes different response in readers. Thus, the dialogic origin and nature of grammar can be revealed through testing readers' responses to the grammatical transformations. The students in Bakhtin's classroom became a community of readers, who tested which response, original or modified, corresponded better to the author's intention:

We ask the students how the hypotaxic sentence [i.e., a complex sentence without conjunctions] they have constructed differs from Pushkin's original sentence. It is not difficult to get them to come up with the reply that our restructuring has destroyed the expressiveness of Pushkin's sentence, that in its current form it has become colder, drier, and more logical.

Along with the students, we persuade ourselves that the dramatic component in the sentence, the intonation, facial expressions, and gestures with which we acted out, so to speak, the interior drama of Pushkin's text, are obviously inappropriate when we read our revised version. The sentence, according to the students, has become more pedantic, mute, suited for silent reading, and no longer begs to be read aloud. In general, as the students learn, we have lost a great deal, from the standpoint of expressiveness, when we replace a parataxic sentence with a hypotaxic one. (p. 18 in this issue)

Through this dialogic testing of the grammatical structure of canon texts by classic Russian poets and writers such as A. Pushkin and N. Gogol, Bakhtin's students not only gained access to the classics' literary crafts but also were able to connect to the canon text: its ideas, aesthetics, ideology, and affects. The Russian classic literary canon became alive for the working class children in Bakhtin's classroom. Through dialogic testing, Bakhtin's students became "legitimate peripheral participants" (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in the readership of Russian literary canonic texts.

A next step in dialogic pedagogy is to transform the students' dialogic testing of the classical literary texts into the students' dialogic authorship. The students were asked to generate their own texts (unfortunately, Bakhtin did not provide much information about content and motives for the students' texts—I suspect that it was politically unsafe for the students and for Bakhtin to describe and discuss the content and motives of the students' texts). Authorship is a dialogic response to a readership's testing of the text—as dialogic testing bridges the Russian classic canonical texts and the lives of the children Bakhtin taught. This reminds me of recent excellent work of contemporary

educators using hip-hop dialogic pedagogy to bridge canonical poetry texts with lives of minority high school students (Lee, 2003; Morrell, 2002).<sup>2</sup>

First, we performed a series of special exercises in which we constructed various versions of complex sentences with and without conjunctions *on set topics*, carefully weighing the stylistic appropriateness and expedience of one or another form. Then in checking homework and classwork, I devoted special attention to all cases where it seemed desirable to substitute a parataxic form [i.e., without conjunctions] for a hypotaxic one [i.e., with conjunctions] and made the appropriate stylistic revisions in the student notebooks. . . . When the work was gone over in class, all these sentences were read and discussed. *At times, the "authors" did not agree with my editorial revisions, and lively and interesting disputes took place.* Of course, there were cases where students got too carried away with the forms of parataxis and used them in some contexts where they were not appropriate [in my view as a teacher]. (p. 23 in this issue, emphasis added)

Classroom disputes and disagreements, including disagreements with the teacher, are the hallmark of dialogic pedagogy. The student's individuality develops through dialogic positioning to and relationships with other members of the literary community involving classroom members, the teacher, and literary classics. "This change in syntactic structure also led to an overall improvement in the students' style, which *became more vivid, more concrete, and emotional, and, most important, began to reveal the personality of the writers, so that their own living individual intonation could be heard*" (p. 24. in this issue, emphasis added).

My last comment on Bakhtin's article is about how skillfully Bakhtin "smuggled" democratic and dialogic pedagogy into totalitarian Stalinist schools. I remember when I was a schoolteacher of physics in a Soviet school in Moscow in the early 1980s my principal told me, "Remember that a Soviet teacher is 90 percent an ideological worker and only 10 percent a teacher of a subject." I suspect that in the Soviet Union, the 1940s were much more repressive and dangerous for dialogic instruction than the 1980s. Bakhtin managed to turn the totalitarian language curriculum with its focus on parroting the correct grammar rules with clichéd and depersonalized content into lessons that were alive, democratic, and rich with personal meanings. Can it be Bakhtin's dialogic response, as a teacher, to the totalitarian educational system? He took the emphasis on grammar that Soviet school system imposed on teachers more seriously and more meaningfully than was expected by the Soviet totalitarian leadership. Traditionally, grammar was considered to be shaped by convention, habit, and rule—which is served perfectly well by totalitarian pedagogy. Bakhtin rejected this traditional no-

tion, and, instead, proposed the idea that grammar is a tool to regulate a dramatic dialogic effect on readers. By taking grammar seriously, Bakhtin dialogized the curriculum, the instruction, and the students.

Finally, I want to draw readers' attention to comments by Russian scholars following Bakhtin's article. We have asked several diverse U.S. scholars who are working on the application of Bakhtin's work to education to provide their comments on Bakhtin's article. They are from different specialization areas in education. These comments are deep historic, cultural, and philological scholarship that makes Bakhtin's text accessible to modern readers. I am also very grateful to the translator, who did a superb job—it is not easy to translate Bakhtin's texts, especially unfinished ones, in that they often involve poetic connotations and play with language. I am also grateful to James Westsch, Michael Cole, and Pentti Hakkarainen for supporting this project.

Our goal is to facilitate discussions stemming from the article.

The original title of Bakhtin's article (in its second draft) was "Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School." We expanded the title of the article to "Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar: Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School" to address a different readership: modern educational researchers, teachers, and linguists. We want to emphasize the importance of other themes in the article that transcend the theme of teaching Russian language in secondary school. We think that Bakhtin, who was concerned with addressivity, would approve of our change.

## Notes

1. The average number of educational articles mentioning Bakhtin in their abstracts listed in CSA ERIC gradually grew from 4.4 per year in 1986–90 to 8 per year by 2002.

2. Although unlike these authors, Bakhtin was against politicizing education (Bakhtin, Duvakin, and Bocharov, 2002). My guess is that Bakhtin was against the "imposed politicizing" that was very common in Soviet history (in a totalitarian regime, everything is considered to be political and binary "us against them"). He was also against the left politicizing of universities at the time preceding the communist revolution in Russia, probably because, in his view, it was propagandistic, dogmatic, and disassociated with the studied academic curriculum. This topic deserves a separate discussion outside the scope of this introductory article.

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